Exploring Academic (Di)stress and Help-Seeking in Faculty of Education Students

Kathleen Moore, B.A. (Hons.), B.Ed.

Department of Graduate and

Undergraduate Studies in Education

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Faculty of Education, Brock University

St. Catharines, Ontario

Abstract

This is a study of education students' conceptions of and experiences with academic stress and help-seeking. The study explored teacher education and Master of Education students' academic stress by examining causes of academic stress and how these stressors affect students' academic and university experiences. Stress-related help-seeking was also a focus of this study, and was explored using inquiries regarding where participants sought stress-related support. Additionally, exploring students' use of the Internet for stress-related information or support was a goal of this study. These research goals were pursued using a qualitative methodology that applied grounded theory design. Consequently, data were used to develop a theory that would contribute to existing literature. Specifically, participant descriptions related to causes of and responses to academic stress aligned with Maslow's (1954) theory of human motivation and Alderfer's (1969) E. R. G. theory, and led to theoretical contributions that took a hierarchy of student needs and motivation into consideration.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Mental illness and academic stress in higher education is receiving growing awareness in the research community due to its increasing prevalence and negative effects on students (Eisenberg, Gollust, Golberstein, & Hefner, 2007; Hysenbegasi, Hass, & Rowland, 2005; Kadison, 2004; Keyes et al., 2012; Salzer, 2012; Zascavage, Winterman, Buot, Wiles, & Lyzinski, 2012; Zivin, Eisenberg, Gollust, & Golberstein, 2009). Despite its prevalence, many postsecondary students who experience emotional distress do not seek help. Existing literature suggests factors such as stigmatization, availability of support, skepticism regarding treatment effectiveness, and a lack of perceived urgency contribute to postsecondary students' lack of willingness to seek help (Eisenberg, Downs, Golberstein, & Zivin, 2009; Eisenberg, Golberstein, & Gollust, 2007; Eisenberg, Hunt, Speer, & Zivin, 2011; Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010; Oliver, Reed, Katz, & Haugh, 1999). Although these factors play an important role in determining help seeking behaviour, the underlying cause of emotional distress is often the academic stress that students experience while attending university (Robotham & Julian, 2006). Accordingly, the purpose of this research is to investigate students' academic stress and related help-seeking. Areas of investigation surrounding academic stress involve causes of academic stress, effects of academic stress on academics and university experiences, and changes in academic stress throughout postsecondary experiences. Student conceptions of help-seeking are examined with inquiries about sources of support, factors that affect their willingness to seek support, and their use of the Internet for stress-related information and support.

Background to the Study

The mental health of higher education students is a field of research that is

gaining continuing attention throughout the media. Initiatives such as Bell Canada's "Let's Talk" day continue to garner the support of communities as they raise money for the research of mental illness (Lau, 2012). Although changes in mental health policy are beginning to take place in communities, school boards, workplaces, and postsecondary institutions, these changes are arguably the result of national and provincial policies that have shed light on the importance of mental well-being. At the national level, the Mental Health Commission of Canada (2012) recently released *Changing Directions, Changing Lives*, which is Canada's first mental health strategy, and it is suggested that 20% of Canadians will experience a mental health problem in their lifetime (Canadian Mental Health Association, n.d.). Provincially, *Open Minds, Healthy Minds: Ontario's Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy* (Ontario Ministry of Health, 2011) seeks to guide mental health policy in Ontario. Although discussing overarching policy recommendations on both a national and provincial scale, neither document encompasses the vast scope of mental health policy for postsecondary institutions.

At the postsecondary level, most students fall into the highest risk age (15-24) for mental illness (Ontario College Health Association, 2010). Combining this with stressors such as living away from home from the first time, being in the competitive postsecondary environment, and having an increasing number of responsibilities may result in students experiencing elevated amounts of stress or distress. Queen's University is taking a leading role in addressing not only the stress and mental health issues that students experience, but also the help-seeking behaviours of these students. Funded by Bell Canada, Queen's was able to appoint an Anti-Stigma Research Chair whose focus is on addressing stigma on campuses and ensuring support becomes more feasible for

students ("Bell Creates," 2012). The initiative largely grew out of growing concern on campuses with regards to student deaths as a result of suicide. This hit home on the campus of Queen's University when in 2010 a student took his own life.

Out of this tragedy, however, began change. The Jack Project was started by the student's father, and with the project's connection to Kids Help Phone, the Mental Health Commission of Canada, and more recently, Queen's University, it began opening the dialogue surrounding mental health and helping youth with the transition to university. On campus, students also began taking action. In April of 2011, students led "Queen's Loves U," a gathering that saw students writing letters to each other encouraging them to stick together as a community (Morrow & Hammer, 2011). While many students on campus banded together, some of them demanded that the university do more in terms of supporting students. Accordingly, an additional full-time counsellor, an Associate Director of Counselling, and an additional counsellor based in residence were hired ("Mental Health Counselling," 2011). Additionally, following several open forums addressing a range of issues related to student mental health and wellness, the Principal's Commission on Mental Health released its comprehensive mental health strategy containing 116 recommendations (Queen's University. 2012). Based on this, Queen's developed a comprehensive mental health strategy.

Although Queen's University has largely led the way in terms of reexamining mental health, student wellness, and supports on campus, other Canadian postsecondary institutions have followed suit. In March 2013, the Ontario Government announced that several of Ontario's colleges and universities will be receiving substantial funding (a portion of $27 million over the next 3 years) to address mental health concerns on their

campuses (Brown, 2013). One project stemming from this funding involves developing a province-wide peer-mentoring program for students with mental health issues, which will be led by Queen's University (Brown, 2013). While this initiative focuses on peer support, another project focuses on faculty and staff, where mental health first aid and suicide intervention training will be provided to staff at Laurentian University (Brown, 2013). Accordingly, the focus is not only on campus counselling centres but also on a variety of resources in the campus community that can provide support or recognize distress.

Furthermore, one initiative that will be launched as a result of the $27 million in funding is a 24-hour hotline for postsecondary students who may need to talk to someone (Brown, 2013). This project is a partnership with Kids Help Phone, and will aim to provide support for postsecondary students whenever they need it. Another project that will be spearheaded by Brock University and Niagara College includes a website that will offer different types of expertise for students in the Niagara area (Brown, 2013). This therefore suggests alternative options to seeking face-to-face counselling are being explored and implemented for postsecondary students.

One component of the mental health strategy released by Queen's University is its focus on transitions: transition from high school to university, from residence to community living, transition among new upper-year students' transition from undergraduate to graduate studies, and transition to the working world. Particularly interesting is their focus on preparing their students for the transition to the working world. A Student Health and Wellness survey on the Queen's campus reported that 61% of respondents are stressed about their future and their careers (Queen's University,

2012). Consequently, the mental health strategy recommended further support in career counselling and additional information regarding career options. One aspect of the transition to the workplace that may have been overlooked, however, is how they are preparing students to cope with and manage stress they might experience when they are in the workplace. Although other national and provincial institutions are only recently beginning to address mental health in the workplace, postsecondary institutions arguably have a role in preparing students not only to manage and cope with stress while in university or college, but also, in preparing them for the potential occupational stresses of the workplace. To summarize, there is growing attention at the national, provincial, and local level in terms of postsecondary student mental health and wellness.

Statement of the Problem Situation

With the noted risk of postsecondary students experiencing distress during their college or university experience, ensuring that a variety of effective supports are available (such as peer mentoring, a 24-hour hotline, and websites) has become even more important. Consideration of the occupational stress students may experience when they are in the workplace leads to the need to continue exploring how students are experiencing academic stress and how they are coping with it.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to examine the conceptions and experiences of faculty of education students with regards to academic stress and their associated help-seeking. The purpose of the research can be categorized into smaller components, with the first aimed at exploring academic stress. The second component of the research encompassed two objectives. First, the study aimed to investigate students' willingness to

seek support for academic stress. The secondary purpose was to examine students' use of the Internet for information about or support for academic stress and help-seeking, along with investigating their willingness to participate in an e-mental health component.

Research Questions

In order to understand how teacher education and Master of Education students experience academic stress, as well as how they seek help for such stress, the following research questions guided the focus of the questionnaire:

1. How do teacher education and Master of Education students conceptualize academic stress?
2. How do teacher education and Master of Education students conceptualize help-seeking for academic stress?
3. How do teacher education and Master of Education students use the Internet for information about or support for academic stress?

In terms of conceptualizing academic stress, inquiries on the data collection tool were made with regards to causes of academic stress, how academic stress affects academics and university experiences, and how academic stress might have changed throughout participants' postsecondary experiences. The second area of investigation, help-seeking, was explored by questioning where participants sought support from and what factors affected their willingness to seek help from different sources. The third research question was investigated by probing participants to describe how they use the Internet for stress-related information or support, to discuss factors that affect their willingness to use the Internet for such support, and to respond to an inquiry about whether they would be willing to use a form of e-mental health.

Rationale

Research that examines well-being, stress, and mental health in university students, in addition to research examining students' support seeking behaviour, contains findings that are often generalized to the undergraduate postsecondary student population. Some studies that are specific to certain vocations address medical students (Compton, Carrera, & Frank, 2008; Durbye, Thomas, & Shanafelt, 2005), law students (Krieger, 2002; Soonpaa, 2004), and nursing students (Lo, 2002; Tully, 2004). This study, however, examined the specific population of faculty of education students, including both teacher education and Master of Education students.

Teacher Education Stress

A Google Scholar search for "preservice teacher stress" found 18 results, while a search for "student teacher stress" revealed 56 results[1]. Further examination of both sets of results revealed a trend: studies focused on the stress that teacher education students experience in their field experiences or practica (Davis, 1990; Murray-Harvey et al., 2000). Few studies examine the experiences of students who had completed a teacher education program as a whole, which included coursework in addition to practicum placements (see, for example, Miller & Fraser, 2000). Accordingly, this study focused on participants' experiences in their teacher education program in general. Furthermore, participants were able to compare these experiences to other years of their postsecondary

[1] In existing literature, the terms preservice teachers, student teachers, and teacher candidates are often used to describe students who are in a teacher education program. For the purposes of this study, the term teacher education student will be used to describe this population.

education, thereby providing some insight into how the stress of the teacher education program relates to undergraduate years.

Graduate Student Stress

A search of Google Scholar using "graduate student stress" in the title as the search criteria revealed 131 results. A similar search of "graduate student mental health" in the title found 73 results. An examination of literature related to the specific population of graduate students revealed a similar trend to studies of undergraduate student stress. Existing studies often examine graduate students as an overarching category and only sometimes do they provide a breakdown of the faculties the participants are from. For example, Oswalt and Riddock (2007) collected data from graduate students at a university and 24.2% (n=54) participants were in education; however, an analysis of how the education participants responded in comparison to other faculties is not provided, and as a result, drawing conclusions about graduate students in education is problematic.

Examining the results of the "graduate student stress" and "graduate student mental health" searches highlighted a lack of literature related to Master's students in Faculties of Education specifically. However, graduate student research does examine specific vocations, similar to undergraduate stress and help-seeking research. Of the existing graduate stress research, much of the literature addresses graduate students in the fields of counselling (Jungbluth, MacFarlane, Veach, & LeRoy, 2011), psychology (El-Ghoroury, Galper, Sawaqdeh, & Bufka, 2012), and nursing (Phillips, 2010). Furthermore, while several studies paid particular attention to specific vocations, others addressed topics such as support and peer mentoring in graduate students and their relationship to stress (e.g., Fleck & Mullins, 2012; Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2000; Lawson & Fuehrer, 2001).

Research addressing specific vocations and the topics of support and mentoring, however, lacks examination of students in Faculty of Education Graduate programs.

Occupational Stress

Researchers have also begun to examine the causes and effects of occupational stress. Moneta (2011) found that "burnout in educational settings has characteristics, antecedents, and consequences similar to those it has in occupational settings" (p. 278). Combining this suggestion with the proposal that the teaching profession continues to be intensified (see, for example, Ferguson, Frost, & Hall, 2012; Williamson & Myhill, 2008) brings concerns regarding teacher training to light. If, as Moneta suggested "it is likely that student burnout follows the same developmental path as worker burnout does" (p. 277), then consideration of how teacher education students and Master of Education students, as future educators, experience and cope with stress is essential. If teacher education students and Master of Education students are experiencing significant distress, and do not develop appropriate coping skills or personal support networks while in postsecondary education, they may face further challenges when they are in the workplace. Consequently, the starting point of this research, which this study undertook, was exploring the conceptions and experiences of teacher education and Master of Education students in terms of their academic stress and associated help-seeking.

Narrowing Down "Academic Stress"

Current research addressing stress in higher education students, particularly undergraduate students, is examined through a wide lens, with consideration of all stressors students could face on and off campus (Gadzella, 1994; Ross, Niebling, & Heckert, 1999). This approach makes it difficult to draw conclusions about stressors

specifically related to academics. Often, stressors in other categories may be related to academics, but are not placed in the academic stressor category. For example, Ross et al. (1999) identify "placed in unfamiliar situation" (p. 5) as an environmental stressor outside of the academic stress category. However, depending on the context, could this stressor not be a component of academic stress, particularly when starting a new program? As such, the result of studies identifying different categories of stressors has resulted in an ambiguous definition of academic stress.

Additionally, most studies addressing academic stress were conducted in the context of the United States; several others were conducted in Australia (e.g., Hemmings & Hockley, 2002; Sumsion & Thomas, 1999). Few studies, however, took place in a Canadian context, and consequently, this study contributes to an existing gap related to the context of these studies.

Researcher's Perspective

Due to the lack of literature addressing the teacher education and Master of Education student populations, it was unclear whether academic stress specifically was an issue that these students faced, nor was it clear whether prospective educators sought support for the stress they experience. I completed a concurrent education program in Ontario and therefore completed the teacher education program in my fifth year of university. Additionally, I have experience in graduate studies in a faculty of education. My experiences have led to a curiosity in terms of whether the topics of stress and help-seeking are relevant to other students in a faculty of education. Based on my experiences, teacher stress, emotional well-being, and help-seeking were not topics that were overtly discussed in coursework. Furthermore, these personal experiences were rarely discussed

amongst peers, and this consequently often led to feelings of isolation in the sense that I felt I was the only one who was struggling; however, from the few discussions I had with peers about these topics, I knew that there were others who were experiencing similar difficulties. This study was therefore an opportunity to explore how students in a faculty of education experienced these topics.

Summary

This research fills a gap in the literature by examining the specific population of students in a faculty of education in terms of their stress and help-seeking behaviour. While existing literature addresses general student populations or specific vocations, graduate student research lacks examination of students in faculty of education graduate programs. Additionally, this study did not solely focus on teacher training practica, which was what current literature addressed. With research now examining occupational stress and its similarities to student stress, this study is the starting point of exploring how teacher stress compares to occupational teacher stress.

In existing stress research, data are influenced by the categories and methods the researcher uses when planning the study. The most commonly used approach is quantitative, whereby surveys with close-ended questions are given to participants (e.g., Insel & Roth, 1985; Kohn & Frazer, 1986). There is therefore a need for a qualitative study that collects data from open-ended questions in order to gain detailed descriptions of participants' experiences. This study's qualitative methodology, combined with its grounded theory framework, allows the data, and the voice of the participants, to guide the organization and implications of this work. The result is a contribution to academic

stress research that is grounded in participants' experiences and conceptions of academic stress and their subsequent support-seeking behaviour in a Canadian context.

Conceptual Framework

As a result of this study being designed as grounded theory, it was important to remain open in terms of where the data might lead. Consequently, the conceptual framework was developed as data were collected and themes began to emerge. In addition to literature, the frameworks provided by Maslow (1954) and Alderfer (1969) were used to organize findings and discuss the implications of the study. Although this study did not specifically or purposefully examine Maslow or Alderfer's frameworks, together they provide an invaluable framework not only for organizing the results of the data but also for grounding considerations of the implications of this work.

Maslow (1954) highlights a hierarchy of needs that provides a theory of human motivation. Maslow's theory of human needs is framed by five levels of needs which he terms (a) physiological needs, (b) safety needs, (c) belongingness and love needs, (d) esteem needs, and (e) a need for self-actualization. Additionally, Maslow suggests motivation is organized according to a "hierarchy of relative prepotency" (Maslow, 1954, p. 83); that is, the lower the need, the more powerful it is in terms of the hierarchy.

The first level of needs, called physiological needs, consists of the most basic needs that are required for survival and which are the first needs someone is likely to be motivated by. This level of needs includes such needs as food, water, sleep, and homeostasis (Maslow, 1954). Maslow suggests:

> Undoubtedly, these physiological needs are the most prepotent of all needs. What this means specifically is that in the human being who is missing everything in

> life in an extreme fashion, it is most likely that the major motivation would be the physiological needs rather than any others. (p. 82)

The lowest level of needs in the hierarchy, the physiological needs, is therefore the first set of needs that a person's behaviour is likely to be motivated by. However, as Maslow suggests, once the physiological needs are satisfied the person's motivation will move toward a higher level of needs. Additionally, once these needs are satisfied, the next level of needs will then drive motivation, and this will continue until the level of self-actualization is met. Maslow suggests the reason a person will move to the next level of needs is because "a want that is satisfied is no longer a want. The organism is dominated and its behaviour organized only by unsatisfied needs" (p. 84). As such, behaviour will no longer be driven by physiological needs if these have been satisfied. Consequently, a new group of needs will begin to drive a person's behaviour, that is, those characterized as safety needs.

Maslow (1954) discusses safety needs primarily by describing how infants and children respond to danger or threats, because their reactions are allegedly more obvious than in adults: "Confronting the average child with new, unfamiliar, strange, unmanageable stimuli or situations will too frequently elicit the danger or terror reactions" (p. 86), arguably due to the fact that these stimuli or situations threaten the safety needs of the child. Although Maslow argues that the safety needs of most adults are largely met, due to the "smoothly running, good society" (p. 87), in some cases, such as for those who are neurotic, Maslow claims, "their reaction is often to unknown, psychological dangers in a world that is perceived to be hostile, overwhelming, and threatening" (p. 88). As such, if a person perceives the world to be overwhelming he/she

may also perceive personal safety needs to be threatened because of the apparent uncertainty and irregularity of society. Consequently, Maslow suggests safety needs such as "the common preference for a job with tenure and protection, the desire for a savings account, and for insurance of various kinds (medical, dental, unemployment, disability, old age)" (p. 87). Until these safety needs are met, a person's behaviour is motivated by trying to satisfy these needs. Once the safety needs are satisfied, the next level of needs in the hierarchy will motivate the person's behaviour.

The third level of needs that is addressed in the hierarchy is needs associated with interpersonal relationships. In this case, gaining a sense of belonging, love, and affection motivates the person. In discussion of this level of needs, Maslow (1954) suggests:

> Now the person will feel keenly, as never before, the absence of friends, or a sweetheart, or a wife, or children. He will hunger for affectionate relations with people in general, namely, for a place in his group, and he will strive with great intensity to achieve this goal. (p. 89)

As is suggested, at this level attaining meaningful interpersonal relationships and feeling as though the person belongs become priority over physiological or safety needs. Behaviour is driven by these needs until the individual is satisfied, at which point the person's motivation will shift toward the next higher level need. Being unable to satisfy these needs, however, can lead to a person feeling lonely, isolated, and rejected.

Behaviour at the next level is geared toward satisfying esteem needs. Maslow (1954) suggests "all people in our society have a need or desire for a stable, firmly based, usually high evaluation of themselves, for self-respect, or self-esteem, and for the esteem of others" (p. 90). Subsequently, Maslow argues that within this level needs can be

classified according to two positions. The first position focuses on the individual's desire for personal accomplishments, while the second position, on the other hand, addresses the desire for recognition or appreciation from others (Maslow, 1954).

With the fourth level of needs, esteem needs, whether the needs become satisfied or not can lead to a variety of responses. If esteem needs are consistently not satisfied it may lead to feelings of inferiority, weakness, and helplessness (Maslow, 1954). However, as Maslow suggests, "satisfaction of the self-esteem need leads to feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability, and adequacy, of being useful and necessary in the world" (p. 91). Satisfying these needs can therefore have positive effects in terms of preparing someone to shift personal motivation and behaviour towards addressing the remaining level of the hierarchy.

The final level of the hierarchy is referred to as the need for self-actualization. Only when each of the previous levels has been satisfied is an individual able to move on to this level. Maslow (1954) suggests this level of needs "refers to a man's [*sic*] desire for self-fulfillment, namely, to the tendency for him to become actualized in what he is potentially" (p. 92). However, what each individual desires in terms of what is required for self-fulfillment will depend on the individual. Existing literature related to stress and help-seeking similarly highlights the role of the individual in determining what is considered stressful and how one will respond to a stressor. However, despite the individuality involved in both stress and help-seeking, along with how each individual will address components of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, this research seeks to explore both this variability as well as the commonalities, particularly in terms of how causes of academic stress, responses to stress, and help-seeking in Teacher Education and Master

of Education students relate to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and subsequently, Alderfer's model as well.

Alderfer (1969) expanded on Maslow's hierarchy of needs and extended motivation theory to reflect a flexible continuum known as E. R. G. theory. According to Alderfer, a person has three needs, which include existence needs, relatedness needs, and growth. The existence needs of the Alderfer model encompass the physiological needs and the physical security aspect of Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs. Additionally, Alderfer's "relatedness" needs incorporate the love and belongingness category of Maslow's theory. The relatedness category also includes social needs and social-esteem needs, which are features of Maslow's esteem needs.

In terms of Maslow's (1954) self-actualization category, Alderfer (1969) categorizes the top of the pyramid as the growth component. Within this component of needs are self-actualization and self-esteem needs, which Maslow had grouped within the esteem needs level. In this case, however, growth needs are focused on the individual and personal growth, and self-esteem needs are therefore a component of this uppermost level.

Alderfer (1969) suggests E. R. G. theory is a continuum from more concrete needs, or existence needs, to less concrete needs, or growth needs. Looking at the existence level of needs, these are concrete because the person should be able to easily identify whether these needs are satisfied or not, due to the fact that they are material items. Moving towards the relatedness or growth levels, however, Alderfer claims there is more uncertainty for the person in terms of whether these are satisfied. Combining this with the notions of satisfaction-progression and frustration-regression emphasizes how a person's motivations can move throughout the continuum. Alderfer highlights that

according to the notion of satisfaction-progression, “as a person fulfills the more concrete aspects of his desires, more of his energy becomes available to deal with the less concrete, more person, and more uncertain aspects of living” (p. 151). However, contrary to Maslow’s (1954) propositions, if a person is progressing to growth needs as a result of satisfying relatedness needs, this does not necessarily mean that existence needs have been met. As a result, a person may be motivated by their growth needs, but some of their energy may still be spent on satisfying existence needs.

In summary, for this study, a combination of Maslow’s (1954) hierarchy of needs and Alderfer’s (1969) E. R. G theory were used as the conceptual framework in order to organize and discuss the findings. As themes were developed based on the data, it was the ways in which causes and responses to stress encompassed physical, emotional, and behavioural components created steps that a student might go through or experience as a result of stress. Consequently, aligning these steps with Maslow and Alderfer’s hierarchy of needs was an appropriate fit for the conceptual framework.

Scope and Limitations

Conducted at a university in southern Ontario, this study involved teacher education students and Master of Education students. The data were collected in the first semester of the 2012-2013 academic year using an online self-report questionnaire.

Limitations

As a result of this study being an exploratory, grounded theory design, findings cannot necessarily be generalized. It will be up to any reader to determine the applicability of any findings in his or her own situation. As the study examined a specific population at one site, additional research addressing academic stress, help-seeking

behaviour, and e-mental health would need to be conducted at other institutions with different populations of students in order for similarities and differences amongst the data to be examined. In addition, although the questionnaire addressed the demographic of gender, it was not explored as a factor due to the fact that only two male students participated in comparison to the 43 female participants. Furthermore, due to its exploratory nature this study did not examine the relationship between the data and year of study, age, race, socioeconomic status, or achievement levels.

Data collection may have taken place during a particular time of stress for students, or, conversely, a particularly stress-free time, and this may have affected their responses to the questionnaire or willingness to participate. A longitudinal study that follows students' stress and support-seeking behaviour throughout one academic year, or several, would provide more trustworthy data. Due to time constraints, however, this was not feasible. Despite this, an exploratory pilot study that begins to investigate a topic provides an opportunity for future research that could further develop the theory that is first drafted in this study.

Outline of the Remainder of the Document

In this chapter I presented the background and rationale that led to this study. In addition, I discussed the problem situation this study aimed to address, highlighted the purpose of the study, and identified the research questions that were used to frame the study. Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs and Alderfer's (1969) E. R. G. theory were outlined as the conceptual frameworks that were used to organize and discuss the findings of the study. The scope and limitations of the study were revealed in order to further illustrate how this study was meant to be a small, exploratory study.

In Chapter 2, I present a review of the literature by addressing topics relevant to my research questions. The first part of the literature review addresses a broad overview of the concept of stress by paying particular attention to presenting different definitions of stress. Following this, the literature review specifically addresses stress in higher education and the current state of the research in this context, while also presenting different instruments that have been used to examine the causes of stress in postsecondary students. Lastly, discussion of electronic help-seeking is provided.

Chapter 3 outlines the research design and methodology that were followed in this research study. The chapter provides a description of the grounded theory research design and discusses the procedures that were followed in selecting a site and participants for the study. The chapter then provides an explanation of the instrumentation, in terms of the online questionnaire and describes the process of pilot testing the questionnaire. The procedure involved in data collection is presented, followed by a discussion of how the data were analyzed. The chapter then presents the methodological parameters, outlined as assumptions and limitations of the study. The following section discusses the efforts that were taken to establish trustworthiness in the study, taking credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability into consideration. The final section of chapter 3 outlines the ethical considerations that were taken into account when designing the study.

Chapter 4 presents the findings that stemmed from the data, including causes of and responses to academic stress. The chapter then addresses the different levels of stress participants highlighted, framed according to low, moderate, and high levels. Further discussion highlights additional themes related to levels of stress, such as fluctuating levels of stress and increased stress. Participants' description of help-seeking are then

framed according to emotional and behavioural components. Discussion of the behavioural component incorporates a description of the theme of coping skills in addition to the theme of support provided from participants' personal or informal support networks (friends and family) and academic or professional supports (professor, doctor, therapist). Factors affecting participants' willingness to seek support are presented, and subsequent discussion addresses the use of e-mental health components, such as Internet support. Lastly, the chapter discusses factors affecting participants' willingness to use the Internet to find information about or support for stress.

In Chapter 5, I provide a discussion of the study's results. Data from chapter 4 are taken and framed according to a combination of Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs and Alderfer's (1969) E. R. G. theory, and a figure illustrating this is presented. The implications of this study are discussed according to the figure shown at the beginning of this chapter. Discussion of implications of this study is organized according to the implications this work has for practice, theory, and further research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review describes stress in higher education and distinguishes academic stress as a focal point. I introduce help-seeking and e-mental health, and discuss the importance of this research.

Stress

Based on its earliest foundations stress may be defined as "the nonspecific response of the body to any demand made upon it" (Selye, 1976, p. 14). Other researchers (e.g., Cox, 1978; Cox & Mackay, 1981, 1985; Lazarus, 1966; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) highlight the role of the individual in determining whether a situation is considered stressful. Lazarus (1966), for example, suggests that personality traits may influence how a situation is appraised, and whether it is deemed as a threat. In addition, the coping processes enacted to address a perceived threat can also depend on the individual's repertoire of processes. Similarly, Cox (1978) defines stress as "a perpetual phenomenon arising from a comparison between the demand on the person and his ability to cope. An imbalance in this mechanism, when coping is important, gives rise to the experience of stress, and to stress response" (p. 25).

These definitions suggest that a demand, or stressor, is always a requirement in the production of stress in an individual. While these definitions support the need for a stressor, Selye (1976) focuses on the idea that there is a nonspecific response that is consistently experienced by *all* those who experience stress, thereby suggesting a common thread among those who experience stress. Cox (1978) and Lazarus (1966), on the other hand, highlight the role of the individual in determining whether a situation is considered stressful and how the individual will respond to the stressor. This suggests

that a situation that is perceived as stressful to one individual may not be considered stressful to another. In addition, if two individuals perceive a situation as stressful, the manner in which they respond to the stressors depends on their individual coping processes. This suggests that experiences and conceptions of stress can be unique to the individual. This research study therefore aimed to examine both the commonalities and variance in faculty of education students' experiences and conceptions of academic stress and how it compares to the literature.

Stress in Higher Education

Stress within the context of higher education has been researched at length with attention being paid to sources and levels of stress (Abouserie, 1994; Campbell & Svenson, 1992; Ross et al., 1999), the effects of stress on physical health (Hystad, Eid, Laberg, & Johnson, 2009; MacGeorge, Samter, & Gillihan, 2005), mental health (McCarthy, Fouladi, Juncker, & Matheny, 2006), and academic performance (Akgun & Ciarrochi, 2003; Struthers, Perry, & Menec, 2000). Research that first addressed stress in higher education focused on isolating the causes of stress in students, while more recent work has focused on student services and determining what measures institutions can provide to help students.

Instruments that focused specifically on students have been developed based on literature and existing instruments that address the general population, such as Holmes and Rahe's (1967) Social Readjustment Rating Scale and Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein's (1983) Global Measure of Perceived Stress. Ross et al. (1999), for example, examined literature and existing instruments that address stress, such as the Student Stress Scale (Insel & Roth, 1985), and created the Student Stress Survey. The

Student Stress Survey (Ross et al., 1999) identifies four categories of stressors that students could face:

1. Intrapersonal stressors, which focus on internal sources such as changes in sleeping and eating habits, new responsibilities, and financial difficulties;
2. Environmental stressors, such as vacations/breaks, waiting in a long line, computer problems, and being placed in unfamiliar situations;
3. Interpersonal stressors, which result from interactions with other people, such as changes in social activities, roommate conflict, working with unfamiliar people, and fights with boyfriend/girlfriend;
4. Academic stressors, which arise from school-related activities and issues, such as an increased workload, a lower grade than anticipated, change of major, and the search for graduate school/job. (pp. 313-317)

Gadzella (1994), while working with students who were also studying stress, developed the "Student-Life Stress Inventory." Similar to Ross et al. (1999), the purpose of the Gadzella inventory is to examine the life stress that students experience both on and off campus. Although Gadzella groups the stressors into categories, they differ from those of Ross et al. While Ross et al. grouped stressors according to the source of the stressor, Gadzella categorizes stressors according to how they are experienced by the individual. The categories and their scope according to Gadzella are:

1. Frustrations: address delays, daily hassles, lack of sources, failures, not being accepted, and being denied.
2. Conflicts: address conflicts which were produced by desirable or undesirable alternatives.

3. Pressures: address experiences related to competition, deadlines, overload, and interpersonal relationships.
4. Changes: address the frequency of changes, the pleasantness of the changes, and how they disrupted the students' lives.
5. Self-Imposed: address competitiveness, level of worry and anxiety, and procrastination habits

Although the Student Stress Survey (Ross et al., 1999) and Student-Life Stress Inventory (Gadzella, 1994) are commonly used for stress research involving students at the postsecondary level, their broad and overlapping categories make it problematic to use these instruments when examining academic stress specifically. Bronfenbrenner's (1986) Ecological Systems model highlights the interactional and overlapping nature of environmental influences, which make using categories problematic. Bronfenbrenner suggests that there are different environmental systems that surround a child, and that influence their development. Although Bronfenbrenner focused on child development, this model highlights the interactional and overlapping nature of stress supported by Cox (1978), Cox and Mackay (1981, 1985), Lazarus (1966), and Lazarus and Folkman (1984).

Additionally, the environmental systems that Bronfenbrenner (1986) proposes affect each individual in a variety of ways. Within the individual, the emotional, social, spiritual, intellectual, and physical dimensions of health are in constant connection to the environmental systems and are therefore affected in different ways by stressors (Hjelm, 2010). This highlights the interactional nature of the model, whereby the different environmental systems interact with each other and with the individual. This

demonstrates that with a variety of influences having an impact on the individual, it is difficult to isolate academic stress as a focal point.

In some cases, such as with the Student Stress Survey (Ross et al. 1999), academic stress is one of several categories examined in a study. Therefore, findings and conclusions related specifically to academic stress sometimes can be made based on these research studies. However, although one of the categories Ross et al. (1999) highlight is academic stressors, aspects of other categories may be related to the academic stressors. Eating and sleeping changes are listed under intrapersonal stressors, but could be attributed to academic stress, which is caused by an environmental factor. This is demonstrated in Bronfenbrenner's (1986) model in the way that the changes within the individual, such as eating and sleeping changes, are influenced by one of the environmental systems, such as the microsystem, which contains influences such as family and the classroom.

The Student-Life Stress Inventory (Gadzella, 1994) also has a broad scope, with stressors from various aspects of student life being attributed to different categories. If modified to focus solely on academics this instrument could provide an academic lens that would fill a gap in existing research. For example, how do the categories that Gadzella (1994) highlight relate to the various systems proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1986), while focusing specifically on academic stress? Despite the difficulties and possibilities, academic stress has nonetheless mainly been examined within the scope of overall student stress, and as a result of the problems associated with this structure, the existing research may not be a reliable source of information regarding academic stress.

Research that examines academic stress specifically is scarcer than research that addresses stress in general. Kohn and Frazer (1986) noticed the gap and developed the Academic Stress Scale, which attempts to focus on academic stressors. The purpose in developing the scale was to highlight which academic stressors were most significant to participants, and the stressors' intensity level. The undergraduate participants were recruited from various disciplines, contributing to a large range of academic stressors that students might face. However, although 15.3% of the participants were in education, the researchers do not provide a breakdown of which stressors the faculty of education students reported. As a result, conclusions about which stressors are reported from this specific group cannot be made.

The most significant academic stressors in the overall sample were:

1. Final grades
2. Excessive homework
3. Term papers
4. Examinations
5. Studying for examinations.

A review of the 35 stressors identified by Kohn and Frazer (1986)—illustrated in Table 1—reveals that although the participants identified these as academic stressors, there are components of this research that relate to the categories of Ross et al. (1999) and Gadzella (1994). For example, other stressors in the Kohn and Frazer study included missing class, buying textbooks, hot classrooms, noisy classrooms, irrelevant classes toward major, and crowded classrooms. Several of these stressors relate to the environmental, interpersonal, and intrapersonal categories highlighted by Ross et al.,

thereby highlighting the difficultly associated with studies that break down stressors into categories. In addition, the categories highlighted by Gadzella provide a lens through which academic stress specifically could be addressed. For example, in terms of the frustrations categories, an academic focus would address which frustrations students face within their educational context, that relate specifically to their academics. Frustrations such as not being able to go away on a weekend are still considered frustrations, but do not relate directly to academic stress. Consequently, that instrument is problematic because it does not directly focus on academic stress. Comparatively, the work of Kohn and Frazer is foundational in terms of looking at academics and stress through a lens that is specific to academics.

Similar to the problems associated with overlapping categories in other instruments, Abouserie (1994) highlights additional difficulties. Based on analysis of literature and input from students, Abouserie (1994) compiled the Academic Stress Questionnaire, which highlights 34 potential causes of stress for students (also shown in Table 1). Participants were also asked to indicate the level of stress experienced for each stressor. Abouserie suggests that students are most directly affected by stressors specifically related to their studies, such as:

1. Examinations and their results
2. Studying for exams
3. Too much to do
4. Amount to learn
5. Need to do well (self-imposed)
6. Essays, projects.

Table 1

Categories and Stressors Reported in Each Major Work Cited

Instrument			
Student Stress Survey[a]	Student Life Stress Inventory[b]	Academic Stress Scale[c]	Academic Stress Questionnaire[d]
Academic stressors: • Increased class workload • Lower grade than anticipated • Change of major • Search for graduate school/job • Missed too many classes • Anticipation of graduation • Serious argument with instructor • Transferred schools Intrapersonal stressors: • Change in sleeping habits • Change in eating habits • New responsibilities • Financial difficulties • Held a job • Spoke in public • Change in use of alcohol or drugs • Outstanding personal achievement	Types of stressors: As a student (frustrations): • I have experienced frustration due to *delays* in reaching my goals • I have experienced *daily hassles* which affected me in reaching my goals • I have experienced *lack of sources* • I have experienced *failures* in accomplishing the goals that I set • I have *not been accepted* socially • I have experienced *dating frustrations* • I feel I was *denied opportunities* in spite of my qualifications I have experienced conflicts which were: • Produced by two or more desirable alternatives • Produced by two or more undesirable alternatives • Produced when a goal had both positive and negative alternatives	No categories when distributed to students. During analysis, divided stressors into three subscales: • Physical • Psychological • Psychosocial Rank of item in Academic Stress Scale: • Final grades • Excessive homework • Term papers • Examinations • Studying for examinations • Class speaking • Waiting for graded tests • Fast-paced lectures • Pop quizzes • Forgotten assignments • Incomplete assignments	Items of ASQ in order of significance according to responses: • Examinations and their results • Studying for exams • Too much to do • Amount to learn • Need to do well (self-imposed) • Essays, projects • Financial problems • Lack of time for study • Timing, spacing of assignments • Need to do well (imposed by others) • Unclear assignments • Worry over future • Forgotten assignments • Unclear course objectives

Table 1 (cont'd)

Categories and Stressors Reported in Each Major Work Cited

Instrument			
Student Stress Survey[a]	Student Life Stress Inventory[b]	Academic Stress Scale[c]	Academic Stress Questionnaire[d]
• Started college • Decline in personal health • Minor law violation • Change in religious beliefs • Death of a family member • Death of a friend • Severe injury • Engagement/Marriage Environmental stressors: • Vacations/breaks • Waited in long line • Computer problems • Placed in unfamiliar situation • Messy living conditions • Put on hold for extended periods of time • Change in living environment • Car trouble • Quit job • Divorce between parents	I experienced pressures: • As a result of *competition* (for grades, work, relationships with others) • Due to *deadlines* (papers due, payments to be made) • Due to an *overload* (attempting to do too many things at one time) • Due to *interpersonal relationships* (family and/or friends, expectations, work responsibilities) I have experienced (changes): • Rapid *unpleasant* changes • *Too many* changes occurring at the same time • Change which *disrupted* my life and/or goals As a person (self-imposed): • I like to compete and win • I like to be noticed and be loved by all • I worry a lot about everything and everybody	• Unclear assignments • Unprepared to respond to questions • Announced quizzes • Studied wrong material • Incorrect answers in class • Missing class • Buying textbooks • Learning new skills • Unclear course objectives • Hot classrooms • Nonnative language lectures • Boring classes • Attending wrong class • Late dismissals of class • Cold classrooms • Arriving late for class • Forgetting pencil/pen • Note-taking in class • Noisy classroom • Irrelevant classes toward major	• Knowing what is important to study • Lack of time for family and friends • Lack of time for own interests • Making choices about career • Learning new skills • Interpersonal difficulties • Uninteresting curriculum • Family crisis • Boring classes • Conflict with people you live with • Personal health problems • Problems with houses • Conflict with spouse, partner • Loneliness • Peer pressures • Conflict with college system

Table 1 (cont'd)

Categories and Stressors Reported in Each Major Work Cited

Instrument			
Student Stress Survey[a]	Student Life Stress Inventory[b]	Academic Stress Scale[c]	Academic Stress Questionnaire[d]
Interpersonal stressors: • Change in social activities • Roommate conflict • Work with people you don't know • Fight with boyfriend/girlfriend • New boyfriend/girlfriend • Trouble with parents	• I have a tendency to procrastinate (put off things that have to be done) • I feel I must find a perfect solution to the problems I undertake • I worry and get anxious about taking tests	• Crowded classes • Classes without open discussion • Evaluating classmates' work • Poor classroom lighting	• Conflict with peer(s) • Home sickness • Conflict with lecturers • Sexual problems

[a] Ross et al. (1999)

[b] Gadzella (1991, as cited in Gadzella, 1994(

[c] Kohn and Frazer (1986)

[d] Abouserie (1994)

Other stressors, such as those examined in this study, may not be directly related to their studies, but demonstrate how, as a result of the student being influenced by different environmental and individual factors, there are a variety of issues which may indirectly affect students' academics. Similar to Kohn and Frazer (1986), the overlapping nature of the stressors can be seen when comparing the Abouserie (1994), Ross et al. (1999), and Gadzella (1994) studies. This demonstrates the difficulty associated with examining academic stress.

Another difficulty with existing research concerning academic stress is that the significance and effect of academic stressors is unclear, largely due to conflicting findings. While Abouserie (1994) found that stressors related directly to students' studies were rated the most powerful causes of stress, Ross et al. (1999) found that only 15% of participants' stressors were attributed to academics. The academic stressors highlighted in Ross et al., organized according to the number of students reporting each source, are:

1. Increased workload
2. Receiving a lower grade than anticipated
3. Changing majors
4. Searching for a graduate school/job
5. Missed too many classes
6. Anticipation of graduation
7. Serious argument with instructor
8. Transferred schools.

Therefore, conflicting findings in existing studies that address academic stress support the need for further investigation.

Although each of these studies examine academic stress to some degree, due to their structure it is difficult to compare the findings and draw generalized conclusions about academic stress for the general student population, and even more so for faculty of education students in particular. For example, although Ross et al. (1999) found a limited number of students attributing their stress to academics, only eight academic stressors were examined, and as mentioned earlier, stressors in other categories could have potentially been placed within the academic stressor group. The difficulty associated with using quantitative instruments to determine which academic stressors students face, in addition to the conflicting findings, results in a scarce body of research that fails to provide a clear picture of academic stress. Leedy and Ormrod (2001) suggest "when little information exists on a topic, when variables are unknown, when a relevant theory base is inadequate or missing, a qualitative study can help define what is important—that is, *what needs to be studied*" (p. 148). The purpose of this research, in using a qualitative methodology, is therefore to conduct an initial inquiry by having participants discuss, in an open-format, the stressors that are directly associated with their academics, without forcing these stressors into categories prematurely.

Electronic Help-Seeking

Research is beginning to examine the use of e-mental health, particularly in the higher education context. E-mental health can be defined as **"**mental and behavioural health promotion, prevention, treatment and management-oriented interventions that are delivered via the internet or other electronic technologies, with or without human support" (Klein, 2010, p. 20). Technology and the Internet provide unique synchronous opportunities for online support groups and counselling by using a webcam, as well as

asynchronous options such as message boards, forums, and e-mail.

Richards (2009) created and launched an online mental health website for university students. The system was composed of three main features: information, which contained a range of e-learning content on mental health; discussion boards monitored by student peer supporters; and e-mail online counselling, whereby students could send a message to a counsellor at the school and would receive a reply via e-mail. Findings highlight that the online portal reaches a population who do not normally use face-to-face services and that online provision can act as a gateway to further support. While several studies note the effectiveness of seeking support online, researchers suggest that the services offered through e-mental health, and e-counselling in particular, should not be used as a replacement to face-to-face counselling, and that it should be seen as an aspect of stepped care (Richards, 2009; Richards & Tangney, 2008). Research shows that students prefer to discuss emotional issues with peers and family prior to seeking help, and therefore, it is suggested that aspects of e-mental health are services that can foster an environment that helps students connect with other students, an online counsellor, community programs, or eventually, a face-to-face counsellor (Richards, 2009).

The University of Western Ontario recently established a section on its website with the sole purpose of providing information for parents, teachers, and students about mental health, thereby illustrating the impact of mental illness in the higher education context (Moskowitz, 2011). The initiative grew from Neal, Campbell, Williams, Liu, and Nussbaumer's (2011) study conducted at the University of Western Ontario that examined students' opinions of available e-mental health resources. Neal et al. found that only a small percentage of participants actually found the information they needed on the

Internet, perceived found information to be helpful, and/or knew what resources are available online. In Western's campus newspaper, Neal et al.'s study is discussed, and attention is drawn to the lack of information students have regarding resources in the community. Some respondents in the survey noted that "they wished Western had these placed more prominently on the website so that they knew they were out there" (Travis, 2011, p. 6). Travis (2011) highlights other main findings from Neal et al.'s study that have begun to fuel change on campus: the best information needs to be front-and-centre and the online resources need to be effective and accessible. The University of Western Ontario has consequently begun its e-mental health initiative through its educational website, which the university hopes will give students more access to information and support.

Findings from Richards's (2009) study also suggest that disinhibition may arise from anonymity. Studies suggest that some students prefer e-mental health and e-counselling due to the privacy and anonymity it fosters. Research examining online counselling suggests that the anonymity and the lack of personal contact through the online method results in an increased likelihood that people will disclose personal information (Richards, 2009). As an example, by using an online method of research, this study will foster this anonymity that is not provided in a face-to-face interview, and will allow participants to openly discuss academic stress and willingness to seek help. With increasing awareness among the higher education community that many students are not seeking informal or formal support when needed (Eisenberg et al., 2009; Eisenberg et al., 2007; Eisenberg et al., 2011; Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010; Oliver et al., 1999), fostering an e-mental health policy seems to be a logical step towards making information, peer support, and formal support easily accessible.

Chapter Summary

Although a significant amount of research has been conducted to examine stress and help-seeking issues at the higher education level, scant research examines these factors in faculty of education students specifically. Some studies provide a breakdown of which departments the participants are part of, such as Kohn and Frazer (1986), and although there is sometimes a population of faculty of education students, researchers do not provide information regarding how students in each faculty responded. Similar to studies examining stress that use the general student population, studies examining help-seeking behaviour also use the general student population. As a result, conclusions about factors regarding stress and faculty of education students' willingness to seek help cannot be drawn from existing research. This means that a study looking at faculty of education students specifically would be beneficial in filling an existing gap.

This chapter has presented an overview of relevant literature addressing the topics of stress as a general concept and stress as it relates to higher education. Additionally, electronic help-seeking was discussed. In the next chapter I outline the methodology for the study.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the methodology and procedures that were followed in completing this study. This chapter details the research design, the site and participant selection process, the data collection and analysis procedures, and the limitations and ethical considerations that were taken into account.

Research Design

The focus of this research was on beginning to develop an explanation of what academic stress means to faculty of education students, how they experience it, and how it affects them. In addition, developing a description of support-seeking behaviours for academic stress with subsequent examination of e-mental health, based on the voice of faculty of education students, was at the forefront of this study. Creswell (2012) suggests "the problems best suited for quantitative research are those in which trends or explanations need to be made. For qualitative research, the problems need to be explored to obtain a deep understanding" (p. 19). As the purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the issues related to academic stress and help-seeking, it therefore used a qualitative method.

According to Creswell (2012) "grounded theory generates a theory when existing theories do not address your problem or the participants that you plan to study" (p. 423). Academic stress, help-seeking behaviour, and e-mental health are issues that have not been addressed in the precise population this study addressed. As a result, a grounded theory approach was best suited as it allowed a theory to be developed based on these topics and in this population.

One restriction in the collection of data according to a grounded theory approach

is that the perspectives and voices of the people being studied must be included (Strauss & Corbin, as cited in Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). In designing a study that addressed academic stress and help-seeking, I paid particular attention towards ensuring the voice of the participants could be brought to light. As a result, open-ended questions were used in the questionnaire, and the presentation of the findings is strongly rooted in the data by using participant excerpts.

Selection of Site and Participants

Sampling for participants came from using purposive sampling in which, as Creswell (2012) suggests, "researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon" (p. 206). As a student with experience in a particular faculty of education, I was aware that many of the topics I wanted to explore in this study were often kept quiet amongst the students. Consequently, a midsize university in southern Ontario was used as the site of this research due to convenience and accessibility.

Participants were selected based on their similar characteristic of being students in a faculty of education at the same university. In homogeneous sampling, "the researcher purposefully samples individuals or sites based on membership in a subgroup that has defining characteristics" (Creswell, 2012, p. 208). Teacher education and Master of Education students were the subgroups of students who were invited to be participants. In terms of teacher education participants, these students were potentially in their final year of a 5-year concurrent education program, or they were consecutive students who were attending the university solely for their teacher education program.

Master of Education students were also participants in the study due to the fact

that many students who complete a teacher education program are now entering graduate programs and still hope to become educators. All students who were enrolled in the domestic program were invited to participate in the study. Students in this program could be enrolled part-time or full-time; however, comparing the experiences of students who were part-time or full-time was outside the scope of this research. As such, this study was meant to be exploratory, in the sense that it sought to investigate overarching issues, rather than delving into specific topics in even more specific populations, such as full-time versus part-time student experiences.

Instrumentation

Creswell (2012) suggests that in qualitative research "you ask open-ended questions so that the participants can best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings" (p. 218). This notion aligns with the goals of a grounded theory methodology whereby the voice of the participants is of utmost importance.

While Leedy and Ormrod (2001) suggested "interviews typically play a major role in data collection, but observations, documents, historical records, videotapes, and anything else of potential relevance to the research question might also be used" (p. 147), it was important to establish a data collection methodology that ensured participants would feel comfortable participating. Participants may have been hesitant to participate in a face-to-face data collection method due to the sensitivity of the topic, and as a result, an online questionnaire was chosen. The questionnaire was anonymous, and it was hoped that the online, open-ended format and anonymous component would produce an environment more conducive to in-depth responses.

The questions for the data collection tool were developed based on a review of existing literature. In addition, a pilot test was completed in order to consider whether there were any problems with the questionnaire in terms of misunderstanding the questions or the questionnaire taking longer than anticipated (Creswell, 2012). According to Creswell (2012), a pilot test "is a procedure in which the researcher makes changes in an instrument based on feedback from a small number of individuals who complete and evaluate the instrument" (p. 390). Two colleagues in the Master of Education program were given the questionnaire and were asked to both respond to the questions as well as to indicate any problems with the questionnaire. Based on their feedback and their responses, in addition to the feedback from my thesis supervisor and committee members, the questions were revisited and the final questionnaire, as illustrated in Appendix A, was posted online in readiness for the participants.

Data Collection

All students in the teacher education program and the Master of Education program were sent an e-mail at the beginning of October inviting them to participate and complete the online questionnaire. All recipients of the e-mail were eligible to participate, regardless of which campus they attended at the university due to the online design of the study. The e-mail contained a brief overview of the study's purpose, what participation comprised, and a statement of Research Ethics Board approval. If students wanted to participate, the e-mail contained the link to the online questionnaire, and they were able to complete it at their own convenience within the given timeline. In mid-October a reminder e-mail was sent to all students in both programs indicating that the deadline to participate was approaching.

Data Analysis

This study's grounded theory approach led to a systematic coding procedure. According to Creswell (2012) "systematic design in grounded theory emphasizes the use of data analysis steps of open, axial, and selective coding, and the development of a logic paradigm or a visual picture of the theory generated" (p. 424). The purpose of open coding is to form initial categories in the data. After I read the data to gain an initial indication of what they contained, I began the open coding process, as shown in Table 2. The first part of open coding was done by working with data from one population, and then moving on to the other. For each question, I made a chart and began segmenting information and forming some initial categories. The participant that provided the segment of data was recorded so that the main categories became clearer as I began refining, and less significant categories could be moved into another category.

Following completion of the initial open coding step a second open coding step was undertaken. In this step, however, the goal was to begin combining the categories and themes from separate questions, rather than keeping data for each question separate. An example of one chart that was created in this process is shown in Figure 1.

Axial coding, the second step in the data analysis process, was then undertaken in order to make connections between existing categories. In order to do so, "the grounded theorist selects one open coding category, positions it at the center of the process being explored, and then relates other categories to it" (Creswell, 2012, p. 427). When completing this step of the data analysis procedure, I created concept maps to easily move data around to make connections between categories as well as illustrate various relationships. An example illustrating how this step was done is shown in Figure 1.

Table 2

Example of Open Coding Procedure

Stressor/cause	Participant
Academic research/work/obligations or requirements of academic course work	1, 16, 18
School	3
High expectations:	3, 12
– From administration (e.g., time lines)	3
– From donors of awards and funding	3
Not knowing how to please people in power (expectations of supervisor)	3
Personal:	3, 9
– Setting goals and being unable to attain them	3
– My own need for self-achievement	9
Fear of failure	15
Academic demands and/or workload	8, 14, 21, 24
Academic responsibilities:	5, 12, 14, 19, 20, 23
– Too many demands in too short an amount of time	5
– Deadlines	12
– "Large amounts of work to be completed by quickly approaching deadlines"	19
Desire for excellence and high quality work:	
– "Constant pressure to succeed"	5
– "Striving to do well"	4
– "Pressure to perform intellectually"	10
– "The need to succeed in an academic environment"	11
– Afraid of doing poorly on an assignment or exam	15, 20
School assignments that appear (or at least initially appear) "over my head"	6
Entering an academic program that is not clearly outlined, leaves a lot of ambiguity in terms of expectations	6
Not being clear on expectations for assignments	9
Trying to balance regular life with schooling and trying to be successful in both	7, 12, 17

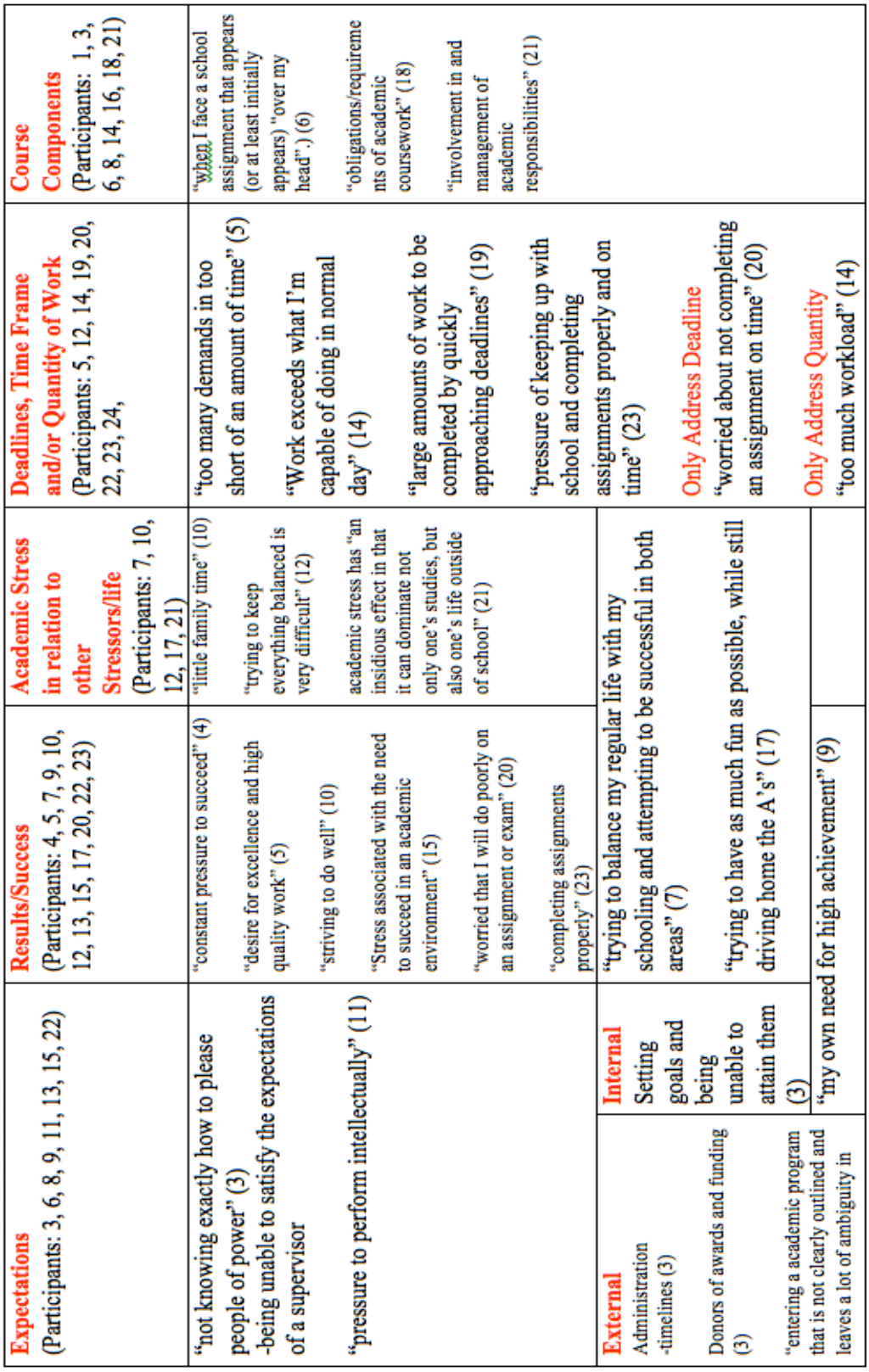

Figure 1. Example of chart created in open coding stage.

Although Creswell (2012) suggests the axial coding phase "involves drawing a diagram, called a coding paradigm, which portrays the interrelationship of causal conditions, strategies, contextual and intervening conditions, and consequences" (p. 427), a figure is illustrated in chapter 5 of this document where discussion of the findings is provided. Additionally, the figure in chapter 5 illustrates the result of the selective coding process, whereby "categories and interrelationships are combined to create a story line that describes "what happens" in the phenomenon being studied" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013, p. 147).

During the axial and selective coding processes, the themes underlined in the causes of and responses to stress categories generate my interest in terms of their connections to Maslow's (1954) and Alderfer's (1969) theoretical frameworks. Consequently, themes in these categories were deductively aligned with the stages of these theoretical models. The result of this process has implications for theory, and is illustrated and discussed in chapter 5.

Assumptions and Limitations

The first assumption of the study was that stress would exist in these populations and that the students would feel comfortable talking about these issues. As a result of this assumption, a qualitative methodology was chosen so that participants could articulate their experiences in their own words. This study further assumed that discussing these topics would not cause additional stress for students.

A limitation of this study was the single phase of data collection that took place during the fall semester of the academic year prior to any teaching placements. Another limitation of this study is that it only took place at one site and within one faculty.

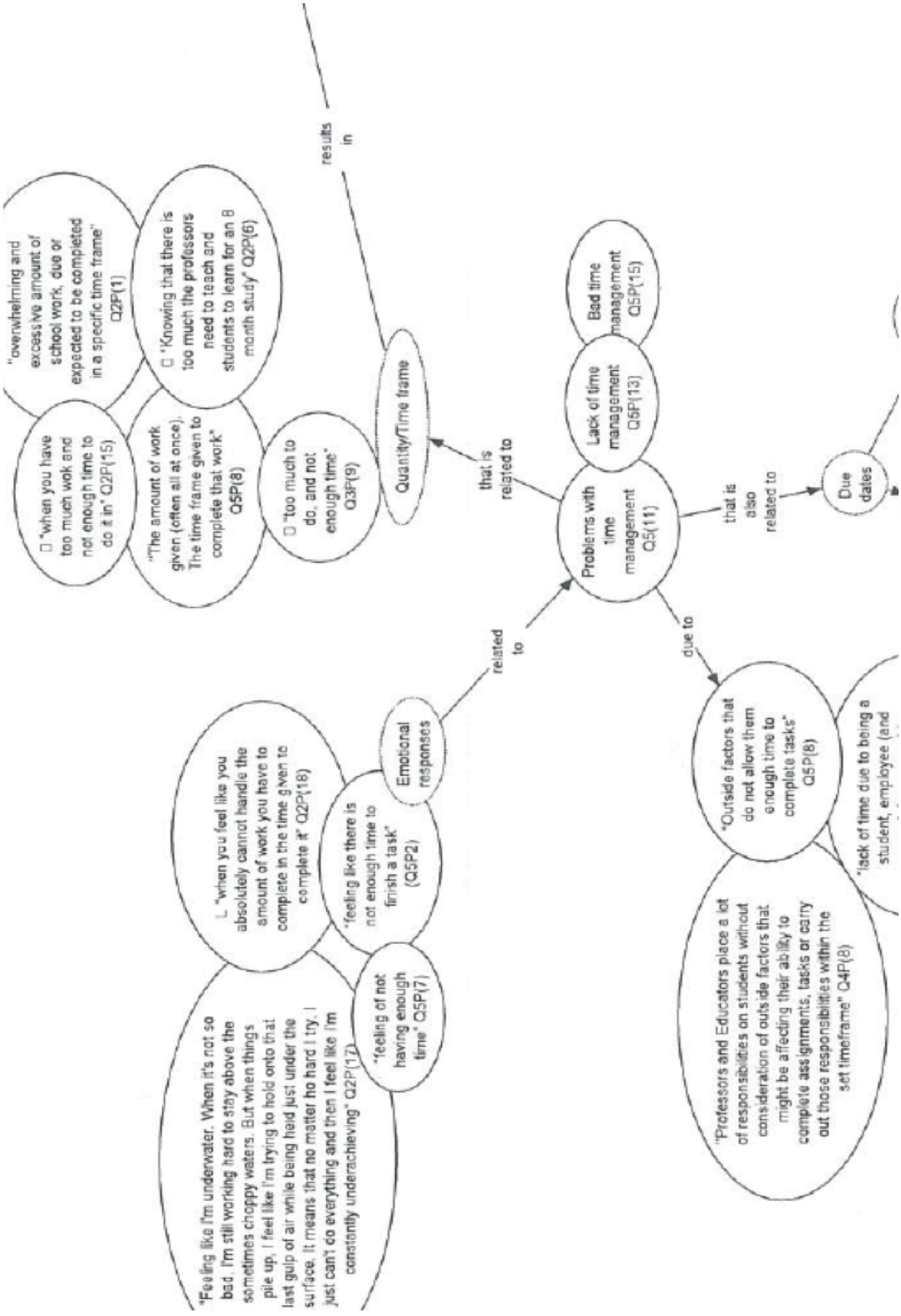

Figure 2. Example of concept map made for one category.

Incorporating different sites and faculties of education would have generated further responses, and consequently, categories and themes could have been expanded or refined. However, part of the grounded theory methodology is keeping in mind that the researcher is beginning to develop a theory based on a phenomenon that has not previous been extensively explored. As such, this small exploratory study produced an initial working draft of a theory that, aligned with grounded theory methods, needs to be further explored in subsequent data collection phases at various sites and with different populations of faculty of education students.

Additionally, as a result of the participants self-selecting to complete the questionnaire, it is questionable if the sample is representative of the population at this site. The students who chose to participate could be those who experience significant academic stress or feel passionately about the topic, thereby affecting the findings. Using another method to recruit participants, such as random sampling, may provide a sample of participants who do not experience academic distress, or provide a variety of perspectives.

Efforts to Establish Trustworthiness

When dealing with qualitative data, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that four factors must be considered when establishing and determining a study's trustworthiness. These factors consist of (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability.

In this study, credibility was established by using two participant groups for data collection. In order to increase the authenticity of the study's results, this study collected data through an online survey and data were constantly compared to literature and my

own experiences as an education student. This helped triangulate the data, which is the process of "corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection" (Creswell, 2012, p. 259). Strauss (1987) suggests that experiential data is important to grounded theorists. Experiential data consists not only of analysts' technical knowledge and experience derived from research, but also their personal experiences (Strauss, 1987). Strauss argues these experiences should not be ignored, and claims, "Mine your experience, there is potential gold there!" (p. 11).

Transferability was difficult to establish in this study due to its grounded theory design, which resulted in it being a small, exploratory study, rather than a study from which one can make generalizations. As Simmons (2004) notes, it is therefore the responsibility of the reader to determine whether the findings of this study can be applied in their context and with their population. Although generalizations cannot be made, this study lent itself to determining where further investigations might be taken in order to further substantiate the grounded theory.

Creswell (2012) suggests that researchers can conduct an external audit: ask a person outside the study to review the study to report strengths and weaknesses. This would increase the dependability of the research, which is the third factor Lincoln and Guba (1985) highlight. According to Schwandt and Halpern (as cited in Creswell, 2012, p. 260) questions that auditors might ask about the research project include:

1. Are the findings grounded in the data?
2. Are inferences logical?
3. Are the themes appropriate?
4. Can inquiry decisions and methodological shifts be justified?

5. What is the degree of researcher bias?
6. What strategies are used for increasing credibility?

Conducting an external audit ensured that developed theory is grounded in the data and the voice of the participants. My supervisor functioned as an external auditor.

Confirmability means that interpretation of the data can be tracked to their sources (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, as cited in Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). By ensuring that findings and conclusions were grounded in the data, confirmability was subsequently reassured, as befits an authentic grounded theory study. The audit also reinforced the confirmability of the findings.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted with the university's Ethics Review Board approval. The Review Board of the site reviewed the application and granted approval (file #12-025).

Participants of this research stood to benefit from the opportunity to voice their conceptions and experiences in relation to a topic that may be particularly relevant to them and their experiences in the education program. It also may have had them consider how they respond to stress in terms of seeking support, and reflect on how these topics may affect them in the future.

Although minimal, there could have been psychological risks involved in participation. Participants may have experienced elevated levels of stress and become embarrassed or worried about the topic of the study or their contributions. Participation in the research was voluntary, and participants also had the option to withdraw from the

study at any time. Additionally, they were able to skip any questions that they were not comfortable answering.

In order to manage the risk involved with participation, participants were fully informed about the purpose of the research and the potential risk in the recruitment e-mail. The introductory section of the questionnaire also indicated that by beginning the questionnaire the participants were providing informed consent. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were also instructed to contact my thesis supervisor, the Ethics Review Board, or myself if they had any concerns regarding their participation. Fostering an environment that made participants feel safe in discussing the sensitive issues pertaining to this study was a primary concern. As a result, the decision was made to use an online data collection methodology and participants also remained anonymous. If students chose to participate, and experienced distress as a result of this involvement, a section of the questionnaire, prior to commencement of the study, highlighted some of the support that is available, such as Health Services and counselling services on campus.

Chapter Summary

This grounded theory study examined the conceptions and experiences of academic stress and help-seeking of participants in a teacher education program or Master of Education program at one university site. Using a qualitative design, an online questionnaire was used to collect data, which were then analyzed. Presentation of the findings is provided in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This study examined faculty of education students' conceptions of and experiences with academic stress. Furthermore, it examined students' perception of and willingness to seek support for academic stress with an underlying focus on e-mental health in particular. A grounded theory methodology was undertaken in order to develop a theory that was grounded in the data, which were the voices of the participants. Data were collected from 25 Master of Education participants and 20 teacher education participants.

The participants' experiences and perceptions are the foundation for the development of a theory that is grounded in the voice of faculty of education students. The majority of participants conceptualized academic stress by identifying causes of their academic stress in addition to responses to this stress, thereby developing the first two overarching categories that are addressed in this chapter. The themes discussed within the causes of academic stress encompass time management, expectations, course components, transitions, and support. Responses to academic stress are presented according to (a) emotional responses, (b) physical responses, and (c) behavioural responses. Subsequent discussion addresses participants' accounts of the extent of stress they experience, which is presented according to (a) low level of stress, (b) moderate level of stress, and (c) high level of stress.

Following discussion of participants' interpretation of academic stress, themes addressing help-seeking is presented. Initial discussion encompasses the overarching topics of (a) the emotional component and (b) the behavioural component. Topics addressed within the behavioural component include individual behavioural coping

strategies as well as external supports. The participants' descriptions of their likeliness to seek various supports are presented, and factors affecting their willingness to seek help from different sources are shared. Participants' described use of the Internet for information related to academic stress as well as for support for stress are presented according to what they use on the Internet and what they hope to gain by accessing it. Lastly, e-counselling and factors affecting willingness to use e-counselling are discussed.

Causes of Academic Stress

The teacher education students and the Master of Education students presented data that led to five themes being formed under the topic of causes of academic stress. The themes consisted of time management, expectations, course components, transitions, and support.

Time Management Issues

The main topics that are discussed within the theme of time management include quantity of work and deadlines and difficulties balancing different kinds of stress. Quantity of work is discussed with an emphasis on the perception that there is an excessive amount of work to complete, often within a specific time frame, and the emotional responses to these stressors are emphasized. Discussion of difficulties associated with balancing different kinds of stressors is then provided, and the negative effect of these difficulties is discussed in terms of life outside of school and on schoolwork.

Quantity of work and deadlines. Participants from both the Master in Education and teacher education groups highlighted several issues related to time management as being one of the causes of academic stress. Several participants from each group

suggested procrastination was a cause of their stress, while some suggested they had "insufficient skills to handle the workload." However, while some participants discussed their own responsibility in terms of issues with time management, others attributed their time management difficulties to factors outside of their control.

Participants from both groups suggested that the amount of schoolwork they were required to complete was not an appropriate amount to accomplish. As one teacher education student suggested, the amount of coursework that is given "does not seem reasonable or feasible." Several participants described the quantity of coursework as "excessive" and one graduate suggested "work exceeds what I'm capable of doing in a normal day." Furthermore, as one teacher education student highlighted, "an abundance of work on a consistent basis" causes academic stress. This sentiment of having a consistently great amount of work to complete is captured by one teacher education student's comment: "In the upcoming month I have something due almost every day." Consequently, from the student perspective, academic stress is often the result of having what is perceived to be too much work.

While some participants addressed issues related to the quantity of work in general, others highlighted concerns related to the quantity of work that is required within a specific time frame, which many claimed was a cause of their stress. One teacher education student suggested the, "overwhelming and excessive amount of school work, due or expected to be completed in a specific timeframe" was a cause of academic stress. Similarly, a graduate student claimed, "I believe academic stress in coursework can be caused by having all assignments due at the same time." In each case, as with other participants who discussed this concern, the issue of having a significant amount of work

due within the same time period is criticized.

In addition to participants discussing the quantity of work and the time frame available to complete work, other participants' comments related to the stress that is caused by deadlines. In this case however, there is no reference to the quantity of work they have to complete. For example, one graduate student suggested "time restrictions and/or deadlines for coursework" caused academic stress. A teacher education student similarly reported experiencing "a moderate level [of stress] through the term, with high stress occurring before assignments are due." Deadlines themselves were therefore frequently discussed as a cause of stress.

Several participants highlighted that academic stress may not only result from deadlines in general, but they also sometimes pinpointed who may be responsible for the stressor. For example, in discussion of what causes their academic stress, one graduate student suggested a stressor was the "pressure to complete assignments well and on time. Professors tend to make due dates around the same time, so multiple assignments due at the same time." In this case, the participant attributed the stressor to the professors' decision to make deadlines at the same time. Similarly, another graduate student pinpointed "administration that set difficult timelines." Teacher education students discussed the same concerns, with one student suggesting that their source of academic stress was "when the program I'm in keeps shifting due dates it provides incomplete information or unclear goals." Many participants therefore suggested their academic stress is the result of the conditions that the institution, administrators, or instructors set.

Emotional responses to quantity of work and deadlines. Also worth noting are some of the comments that participants provided in terms of the emotional responses that

sometimes result from stressors specifically related to quantity of work and deadlines. One graduate student, for example, commented that he/she was "worried about not completing an assignment on time." Teacher education students similarly voiced how they felt with regards to the quantity of work and the timelines. In one instance, a teacher education student described academic stress as: "when you feel like you absolutely cannot handle the amount of work you have to complete in the time given to complete it." Similarly, another teacher education participant also provided a depiction of how he/she felt with regards to the quantity of work, deadlines, and academic stress:

> Feeling like I'm underwater. When it's not so bad, I'm still working hard to stay above the sometimes choppy waters. But when things pile up, I feel like I'm trying to hold onto that last gulp of air while being held just under the surface. It means that no matter how hard I try, I just can't do everything and then I feel like I'm constantly underachieving.

Balancing different kinds of stress. In trying to describe their conceptions of and experiences with academic stress some teacher education students began to classify different type of stress or stressors. One student identified three types of stress: (a) school based, (b) stress related to personal expectations, and (c) peripheral stress. Another student suggested, "academic stress is separate from everyday aspects of life." An additional overarching theme in both the Master of Education and teacher education program therefore stems from classifications of different types of stress, and it addresses issues related to balancing aspects of academics with other types of stressors. Participants in both groups voiced concerns related to finding balance between different areas of stress, as is suggested by one teacher education student who claimed a source of his/her

stress is “balancing life responsibilities with academic responsibilities.”

Negative effect on life outside of school. Academic responsibilities were discussed by participants as being a contributing factor in their difficulties balancing different stressors. Participants in both groups commented on the stress associated with academics having a negative effect on their life outside of school. For example, one graduate student claimed that a source of stress was “schoolwork interfering with daily life.” Similarly, other graduate students suggested “academic stress has an insidious effect in that it can dominate not only one’s studies, but also one’s life outside of school” and “too much school-related work to the point where I cannot focus on anything but my schoolwork.” Teacher education students equally had concerns with the impact that academics had on their life outside of school, with one student claiming part of academic stress was “trying to maintain some semblance of life outside of academics.” As such, the manner in which participants discussed having difficulty balancing different areas of stress in addition to their academics having a negative effect on life outside of school suggests participants have concerns related to time management.

Relationships. In addition to participants suggesting their academics interfere with their social and personal lives, relationships were also discussed in terms of the strain that results from the difficulty associated with balancing different obligations. Many graduate students referred to the difficulties associated with juggling family obligations and relationships with other responsibilities such as academics and employment. One graduate student suggested that as a result of having competing obligations, sometimes there would be “little family time,” which resulted in increased levels of stress. While addressing how his/her stress may have changed throughout their

postsecondary experience, another graduate student similarly responded, “yes [it has increased]. Because I have to now balance school with family obligations, work, and friendships.” Teacher education students similarly discussed concerns related to relationships and balancing different obligations. In response to whether stress levels had changed throughout their postsecondary education, several teacher education students claimed it was now higher due to different obligations. For example, one teacher education student responded, “My academic stress has become even greater while in postsecondary because of the amount of other stresses I have…. [such as] regular at home duties, maintaining relationships/social life.” Consequently, participants described their concerns related to maintaining their relationships, which can be attributed to time management.

One teacher education student commented on the fact that some peers have children; some participants highlight some of the difficulties associated with being a student and parent. For example, one teacher education student suggested that the “lack of time due to being a student, employee (and parent, in my case) is physically and mentally stressful and exhausting.” In response to whether stress levels had changed throughout their postsecondary education, one teacher education student claimed, “Yes. It’s higher, more difficult to see my child, take care of house/home and meet the demands of school.” While several teacher education participants referred specifically to being a parent or having a child, comments from graduate student more broadly referred to “family obligations” rather than referring to specifics related to difficulties associated with being a parent. Consequently, participants from both groups described their struggles with time management in terms of the negative effects academics have on

maintaining relationships and the strain it places on families, particularly those who have children.

Finances and employment. One graduate student suggested that "finances cause negative stress" while another, claimed the "increased cost of living" was a source of stress. These comments are echoed by the concerns of another graduate student who claimed that "undisclosed and escalating tuition fees" lead to stress. This notion of financial stress as an underlying theme within trying to balance different areas of stress was also present in the teacher education data, in which one student voiced that "the over-hanging financial concerns of being a student is an underlying source of stress." Often the outcome of students' financial concerns may be students' finding a source of employment throughout the school term. For example, one graduate student said, "we're living in conditions of a tough economy. This means having to work to sustain ourselves while studying." This sentiment is further expressed by another graduate who claimed having to maintain "low paying and unstable employment to pay fees and for texts" was a source of stress. Teacher education students similarly voiced their concerns with regards to maintaining employment throughout the school year: "We don't just go to school. The postsecondary students of today must hold jobs to survive during the school year." In these cases, participants describe the need to find employment due to financial concerns.

While several participants in both groups voiced their concerns with regards to financial stress and subsequent employment, others suggested that they also face stress due to their lack of employment. One teacher education student discusses a source of her stress: "Lack of financial support—I am a single mother with no income. I will be using a food bank soon." Another teacher education student, who categorizes financial stress as a

peripheral stress, claimed, “I travel out of town to attend school, have a family to support and no income.” With this in mind, while financial stress may result in some choosing to find employment and risking additional areas of stress, others may choose not to work and subsequently experience financial stress.

Negative effect on school. A consequence of making decisions that put further strain in terms of time management is that school obligations may be neglected. Participants who discussed difficulties with balancing different areas of stressors also referred to some of the academic consequences of having to balance different roles. One graduate student claimed, “Competing obligations, whether real or self-imposed, (work, family, faith) sometimes push off when work can get done. The more the work gets pushed off, the greater the stress one is likely to feel.” This participant’s perception that stressors outside of school would result in academics getting set aside was also voiced by teacher education students. One teacher education student suggested “outside factors that do not allow them enough time to complete tasks” are a source of stress.

In summation, quantity of work and deadlines were discussed as issues that students might experience and which they attribute to external factors such as the institution they attend or professors. Difficulty with time management may therefore be the result of the quantity of work and deadlines that external sources establish. Furthermore, difficulty with time management is experienced as a result of trying to balance different types of stress, and this has consequences on students’ academic lives in addition to their lives outside of school.

Expectations

Another theme that was presented in the data relates to expectations, both

personal expectations and expectations from external sources. Several participants provided comments addressing expectations in general, while others noted whether the expectation was a personal expectation or the expectation from an external source. One graduate student noted that he/she experienced "pressure from self and family," while another suggested academic stress "is caused by the pressure of keeping up with school and completing assignments properly and on time." Similarly, another graduate student described academic stress as "pressure to perform intellectually." In this case the pressure could be pressure stemming from personal expectations or expectations from others. In this case, the participant noted the pressure to perform intellectually. In most cases, however, participants described their pressure in terms of the pressure to be successful. Some students discussed the overarching theme of success and being under pressure in general terms. For example, graduate students described academic stress in terms of "striving to do well" and a "constant pressure to succeed." This was similarly voiced by teacher education students who claimed they strive to achieve "academic success." In addition to participants discussing success, they also often defined success in terms of the grades they achieved. One graduate student, for example, claimed academic stress was "the pressure to succeed by getting high marks." Accordingly, this section will discuss participants' concerns related to expectations, both personal expectations and expectations from others. In addition, it will emphasize their desire for success and some of the emotional responses participants experience as a result of this pressure.

Personal expectations and goals. While some students discussed the issues of being successful and getting good grades in general terms, others highlighted whether these stressors were the result of personal expectations or the result of external sources.

Several students identified the pressure they put on themselves to be successful. For example, one graduate student claimed their academic stress stemmed from "my own need for high achievement." Another graduate student similarly described academic stress in this way: "It's the pressure I feel to do well… I always want to feel like I can hit a certain high standard when it comes to academic achievement." This notion of having personal expectations for success and achievement was also shown by teacher education students, one of whom stated academic stress was "the pressure to excel greatly in programs so they have ability to choose what they wish to do in the future." Participants who discussed the need for success and good grades in terms of personal expectations therefore suggested that academic stress is sometimes the result of the participants themselves. While many students noted the pressure they place on themselves to achieve success and good grades, a few students highlighted some of the consequences that can often result from this mentality. For example, one graduate student claimed, "Personal failure: Setting goals and being unable to attain them is a cause of my academic stress."

One factor that may challenge a students' ability to be successful in academics is difficulty with time management. This is voiced by one Master of Education participant who claimed, "trying to balance my regular life with my schooling and attempting to be successful in both areas" was a stressor, while another participant suggested that that his/her perception of academic stress was "to have as much fun as possible, while still getting A's." Consequently, the focus of many students is to try and achieve balance and success between the different areas of their lives.

Comparison with others. Although it was not a theme that was presented in the teacher education data, graduate student data revealed that a cause of academic stress was

sometimes related to making comparisons to other students. One graduate student suggested: “I think that my academic stress is largely enhanced by the stress of others (i.e., when students complain about a project) because then I feel insecure about my work/feel like I have not done a good job.” In this case the participant compares him/herself to other students who discuss their work, and as a result of feeling insecure about his/her own work, experiences academic stress. While some students such as this participant may compare personal work to that of peers prior to submitting it to be assessed, others may compare themselves in other respects. For example, one graduate student claimed: “I have yet to meet my faculty consultant, and yet I have class with some students who have found an advisor and are starting to look into literature—this makes me panic that I am already falling behind.” This participant addresses comparison with others in terms of other aspects of academics such as progress made on research projects. Making comparisons to others in various ways was therefore an issue that many discussed as being a source of stress.

Expectations from external sources. While several participants commented on the personal expectations they had, other participants commented on the expectations that may come from external sources, such as their family or academic program. Two concerns that were commonly expressed included (a) high expectations and (b) unclear expectations.

The main cause of stress relating to both expectations of external sources and achievement stemmed from “having to maintain an average,” as one graduate student suggested. A teacher education student voiced a similar concern: “I am in concurrent education/teachers college. We have stress not because we have high expectations for

ourselves. We HAVE to do well." In terms of the requirement to do well, one graduate student shed light on what may happen if this is not achieved:

> In my undergraduate degree, there were a lot of almost "threats" from the program and professors that I would be kicked out if I didn't have a certain level of achievement. While those threats don't necessarily exist at the graduate level, I do feel a certain push that without a certain level of achievement, I won't be able to find an advisor and complete my research.

In this case, the participant noted one of the possible consequences that may result from not achieving a certain standard. However, in addition to noting the possibility of being removed from the program, the participant also suggested that even without there being a stringent requirement to achieve high grades, there is still a sense that without high grades there may be difficulties in the program.

In addition to some participants highlighting how high expectations can affect stress levels, others suggested that unclear expectations could also cause academic stress. One graduate student suggested that "not knowing how to please people of power" was a source of stress, while other participants mainly pinpointed uncertainty with regards to the program they were in, or the coursework they had. In terms of the program, one graduate student suggested "entering an academic program that is not clearly outlined and leaves a lot of ambiguity in terms of expectations" causes stress. Similarly, another graduate student claimed "undisclosed expectations and hidden agendas and not receiving information in a timely manner" was a source of academic stress. Teacher education students voiced similar issues with regards to uncertainties in the program. In discussion of what causes their academic stress, one teacher education student pinpointed "when the

program I'm in keeps shifting due dates, and provides incomplete information or unclear goals." Similar to the manner in which unclear expectations in the program may cause stress, participants also said unclear expectations related to coursework can result in stress. Participants from both groups claimed "unclear instructions or expectations on work" often resulted in higher levels of stress. Consequently, in addition to the possibility that high expectations from external sources may cause stress, unclear expectations may also cause increased stress in students.

Emotional responses to expectations. While many participants illuminated the issues of personal expectations and expectations from other sources, some also provided additional commentary on the emotions that are often associated with having expectations related to success. Participants from both groups discussed their:

- Insecurity
- Lack of confidence
- Feelings of being incompetent
- Feelings of uncertainty.

These sentiments are best illustrated by how participants in both groups discussed the future and possible job opportunities. One graduate student pinpointed, "fear of failure in academics, resulting in a fear of failing in life" as a cause of academic stress. Similarly, another graduate student suggested, "I worry that I may be a failure academically. If I fail at school, I may not be able to secure a good job later in life." Teacher education students also discussed the abovementioned emotions in relation to personal expectations and success in the future. One teacher education participant suggested the "uncertainty of finding employment after school" caused academic stress, while another similarly

claimed academic stress was caused by the "pressure to excel greatly in programs so they have the ability to choose what they wish to do in the future." Therefore, students experience stress as a result of the desire to succeed possibly due to their concerns about the future.

In addition to the emotions that are related to the issues of academic success one graduate student addressed how stress had changed throughout postsecondary as a result: "Absolutely. I have far more stress than I used to. There is greater pressure to achieve more and get better grades." This suggests that not only do some students worry about grades and fear failure, but their level of stress may increase as they progress through their postsecondary education, possibly as they near the end of their program and there is increasing uncertainty regarding what they will be doing after graduation.

This section therefore demonstrated how both personal expectations and expectations from external sources have a large impact on the level of stress students may experience. Faculty of education students may set high expectations for themselves, and making comparisons to others may worsen the effects of the resulting stress. Similarly, high expectations from external sources put pressure on students to be successful. Unclear expectations were discussed in terms of how they may threaten students' ability to achieve high levels, and the emotional responses to expectations were emphasized.

Course Components

An additional theme stemming from the two participant groups was course components, used as an umbrella category. While several participants discussed course requirements as a general source of stress, others highlighted specific components within courses that resulted in stress. Accordingly, each of these topics is discussed in this section.

Several students from each group referred to course components in general as a cause of stressors. For example, one graduate participant claimed “academic demands and/or workload” cause academic stress, while another highlighted “obligations/ requirements of academic coursework” as a stressor. Similarly, teacher education students pinpointed “academic requirements” and “coursework” as causes of academic stress. Although several participants in each participant group referred to course components in general terms, other participants in each group discussed specific course components that cause academic stress.

Some participants discussed assignments as a specific course component that caused academic stress. Five teacher education students referred to assignments/projects as a source of stress, but did not expand on what specifically was stressful about them. Graduate students, on the other hand, did provide insight into some of the issues that relate to assignments. For example, one graduate student suggested a source of academic stress was when “an assignment that doesn’t appeal to my learning style is given out.” Another graduate student commented on a different aspect of assignments that caused academic stress: “The assignments are much bigger and worth a lot more of my grade, so if I do poorly on one then it’s harder to recover from.” Therefore, the issues of the types of assignments that are provided and the percentages assignments are worth in terms of final grades were highlighted as concerns students had with regards to assignments and projects.

In addition to the types of assignments and the value of assignments being a cause of stress, content difficulty was also a frequently reported aspect of assignments that was considered stressful. One graduate student suggested “lack of understanding of the task”

was a cause of academic stress, and this was similarly reported from several teacher education participants. As a result of the difficulty level, one graduate student suggested "tasks are at a difficulty level that leaves us unsure as to how to tackle the task." Due to a lack of understanding in terms of the assignment and what is required, some students may consequently struggle to start the task.

While assignments and content difficulty were the most frequently mentioned specific aspects of course components that caused stress, other less frequently reported components were also mentioned. For example, one teacher education student suggested "exams are just stressful for pretty much every reason," while one graduate student, in discussing periods of elevated stress, suggested: "yes, in particular during exam times." In addition to exams being mentioned by a limited number of participants, the addition of online components of coursework was also pinpointed as a stressor by one teacher education student. This participant claimed:

> The addition of online components to courses where classroom involvement and homework load is already heavy is a huge source of stress. Learning to use the new programs/forums on top of familiarizing myself with the course content is very stressful for me.

Consequently, students may consider different aspects of assignments stressful, including the type of assignment, the weight of the assignment on the final grade, the difficulty level, and any online components.

Transitions

Transitions were also discussed in terms of causes of academic stress. A few students from each participant group mentioned transitions; however, they were not a

significant point of discussion for either group. One graduate student, however, did say "I find the start of this program to be stressful because every student appears to have a different understanding and speed of involvement in the research process." A teacher education student similarly highlighted "a feeling of being 'lost,' especially at the beginning of the year, when trying to familiarize yourself with new teachers, new schedule, new places (classrooms or campuses) and new online networks." Although transitions were not a main topic of discussion, it provides insight into some of the difficulty students may experience at the beginning of a program.

Support

Although not as prominent in the teacher education participant group as in the Master of Education group, the notion of students having a lack of support was discussed. One graduate student attributed his/her academic stress to "no support at school, work, or home." While this was not a concern that was voiced by many, it is noteworthy that someone would feel as though he/she had no support. Several other participants noted lack of support in terms of faculty. One graduate student suggested "writing large papers with little direction/support from faculty" was a source of academic stress. While some felt having little guidance in terms of how to complete an assignment, others noted the lack of guidance when assignments were returned. As one graduate student suggested, "doing poorly on assignments with little feedback to improve is a cause of stress." These participants therefore pinpointed one area where faculty members play a role in affecting the level of stress their students' experience.

This section highlighted the main themes stemming from participants' responses that indicated main causes of academic stress. Time management and its relationship to

quantity of work and deadlines, as well as to balancing different areas of stress, were discussed. Personal expectations and expectations from external sources were discussed, and the topics of high achievement and uncertainty were highlighted in relation to these topics. Furthermore, the specific components of courses that may lead to student stress were outlined, and the uncertainty associated with transitions and how this results in stress was discussed. Lastly, although not a prominent theme, participants' perception of having a lack of support outside of school and within school was briefly mentioned. Although some responses to stress were discussed in this section because they related to these themes specifically, other responses to academic stress in a broader perspective are discussed in the next section.

Responses to Academic Stress

In describing the causes of their academic stress, participants also subsequently described the responses that they may experience as a result of experiencing academic stress. One graduate student provided a general description of how a person can be affected by academic stress, saying it "can impact one's health, creating a host of stress-related ailments that can confound illness." In terms of stress-related ailments, responses to academic stress can vary. The following section describes the range of responses that were identified in the data, grouped according to: (a) emotional responses, (b) physical responses, and (c) behavioural responses.

Emotional Responses

One dimension of responses to academic stress includes emotions. Many students from both participant groups referred to emotional responses that may be experienced as a result of academic stress. Participants described some responses to academic stress as

"emotional changes" or "unwanted emotions," as two teacher education students suggested. Accordingly, this section describes the emotional responses, which are often unwanted, that participants experienced. The themes that are discussed include feelings associated with (a) inadequacy/hopelessness, (b) being overwhelmed/under pressure, and (c) anxiety.

Inadequacy/hopelessness. Two graduate students commented on feelings of inadequacy, including "feeling like I don't belong because I don't know what I'm doing" and having a "limited sense of self worth." A teacher education student similarly responded that a sign of academic stress were students "feeling like they are constantly underachieving." Related to the topic of feeling inadequate, participants also discussed feelings of hopelessness. One teacher education student described "a feeling of being lost" while another claimed "I feel extremely frustrated with a helpless feeling." In addition to feelings of inadequacy and hopelessness, participants also reported experiencing depression as a result of academic stress. Three graduate students and five teacher education students discussed depression, with one teacher education student claiming, "I almost feel depressed and like giving up," while another teacher education student claimed their "mood crashes" when experiencing academic stress. Feelings of inadequacy and hopelessness were therefore main themes that were discussed within each participant group.

Overwhelmed/under pressure. Experiencing a sense of being overwhelmed was also commonly revealed in the data. One graduate student claimed academic stress meant "feeling overwhelmed by the simplest task." The notion of being overwhelmed while experiencing academic stress was a prominent theme in the teacher education data. A

teacher education student described the sense of being overwhelmed as "working with no end in sight" and another suggested it was "feeling that you will never get it done." While this was a frequently discussed topic in the teacher education data, it was not as prominent in the graduate student data. Rather than describing a sense of being overwhelmed, graduate students provided insight into the notion of being under significant strain or pressure. One graduate student described academic stress as "when school weighs heavy on your shoulders," and another suggested there was an "elevated sense of doom" when experiencing academic stress. Therefore, although participants may have used different terminology, participants from both groups described a sense of being overwhelmed or under pressure, and the way in which these are described means it is associated with the emotional dimension of health.

Anxiety. In addition to feelings of inadequacy/hopelessness and being overwhelmed/under pressure, other symptoms that were mentioned by participants from both groups included being worried, nervous, confused, anxious, irritable, and frustrated. Seven graduate students addressed how they were worried or nervous, and as one suggested, their "thoughts circle endlessly" when they experience academic stress. Another graduate student claimed he or she experienced "constant thought on success or failure." Similarly, a teacher education student claimed he or she was "consistently worried about the future." Five teacher education students similarly identified worry and nervousness as symptoms of academic stress. Similar to nervousness, 10 graduate students specifically mentioned being anxious when stressed, while eight teacher education students reported the same symptomology. Moreover, five students from the graduate program and eight students from teacher education reported being irritable and

agitated when they were experiencing stress. Lastly, participants from both groups discussed being frustrated or flustered while experiencing stress. As one teacher education student suggested, “high stress has a negative effect as it creates uncertainty and frustration as well as increases second guessing and lowers confidence in academic performance.” As this range of emotional responses demonstrates, students may respond to academic stress in a variety of ways.

As this section suggested, some responses to stress that students may experience include emotional feelings related to inadequacy and hopelessness, which participants suggested related to issues of self worth and feelings of depression. Participants in both groups also highlighted the second theme, which was a sense of being overwhelmed and under pressure. A variety of emotional responses related to anxiety were also pinpointed. As the next section highlights, students may experience other types of responses such as physical responses.

Physical Responses

One graduate student suggested that academic stress could be described as “a physiological reaction to mounting psychological anxiety.” In this case the participant makes a connection between different dimensions of stress, both physical and emotional. Similarly, another graduate student claimed, “sometimes I have a breakdown (worry, crying, panic, etc.),” also highlighting how responses can encompass several dimensions. However, in addition to some specific emotional responses being reported, specific physical responses were also discussed. In terms of physical responses to academic stress, several participants from the graduate student group noted that the body is negatively affected by academic stress. In addition, many students from both groups provided

specific ways in which the body was negatively affected, thereby illuminating some of the symptoms both teacher education and Master of Education students may be experiencing as a result of academic stress.

Sleeping pattern. One theme that was revealed in the data and that relates to physical responses to stress includes participants' sleeping patterns. Participants from both groups noted how their sleeping pattern was negatively affected by academic stress. A teacher education participant noted he/she knew when academic stress was being experienced because of sleeping pattern changes, and others similarly expressed this notion. While some participants noted that they often had to stay up late to complete work, as discussed in the behavioural responses section, the main difficulty related to sleeping patterns that participants noted in relation to physical responses was that they had problems sleeping, as was the case with one student who discussed difficulties with insomnia. Several students noted that they also felt physically tired and fatigued as a result of having difficulties sleeping when experiencing academic stress. Some participants also suggested that they knew when people were stressed because they looked tired or drained. One teacher education participant suggested he or she knew when someone was stressed because the person may be "haggard-looking and becoming more unkempt, tired-looking." Accordingly, participants' lack of sleep and fatigue is a symptomology that may be attributed to the person's need to stay up late, or, their physical inability to sleep.

Eating pattern. In addition to participants discussing responses related to their sleeping patterns, eating pattern changes were also noted by several participants. One graduate student noted that his or her response to academic stress was improper eating.

Others noted how this improper eating could be described, such as being always hungry, overeating, and drinking too much coffee. On the other hand, some participants noted that they often had a limited appetite and were unable to eat or were not able to eat as much as they normally did as a result of the stress they were experiencing. Accordingly, while the eating patterns of some participants are affected by stress in the sense that they overeat, others are not able to eat.

Concentration. Participants who were primarily from the teacher education participant group discussed having difficulty concentrating. “I tend to be unfocused and lack extreme concentration,” said one teacher education student. This notion of being unfocused was also voiced by other participants, one of which claimed academic stress “decreases focus in seminars and lectures.” Similarly, another teacher education commented: “I think it decreases attention in class and on exams.” While topics related to anxiety were placed with the emotional responses category, the overlapping nature of the health dimensions means that often there may be physical or behavioural responses that coincide. With this in mind, the theme of concentration is an example where it could be associated with the symptoms of anxiety that were discussed in the emotional component.

Other physical responses. While the abovementioned physical responses were central themes in the data, other less focal responses were also reported. For example, two graduate students and one teacher education student referred to headaches as a response to stress. Furthermore, three participants from the graduate student participant group noted that they experienced tension throughout their bodies. One of these students claimed “I get tension in my muscles, around my neck and shoulders,” while another noted a symptom of stress was “tight muscles in the abdomen, upper back, shoulders and

neck." A teacher education student similarly noted that his or her chest tightened when experiencing academic stress. Another less frequently reported physical response of stress relates to feeling nauseous or uneasy. Two graduate students noted their symptoms of feeling nauseous when they are stressed, while four teacher education students mentioned feeling sick or having an upset stomach. In addition to muscle tension and having an upset stomach, other physical responses that were mentioned only a limited number of times included memory loss, shaking, suppressed breathing, having a racing heart, and heat flashes.

Additionally, several participants provided insight into the notion that stress may be observable in some cases. One teacher education student suggested he or she could tell when peers were stressed because they "look upset," while another noted, "I just notice their distress on their faces and expression." While emotional responses may not be observable, physical responses such as sleeping and eating patterns, concentration issues, and other physical responses such as tension can be observed.

Behavioural Responses

In addition to emotional and physical responses, participants from both groups identified other responses to academic stress that relate to aspects of behaviour. One teacher education student claimed "for others it becomes clear with their behaviour," when discussing how others respond to academic stress. Several graduate students presented similar insights, with one participant saying, "stress may cause [students] to behave in ways that they otherwise might not." Similarly, another graduate student claimed he or she knew when a person was stressed because "the person begins acting in ways that are not 'typical'." This section therefore presents the behaviours that

participants described as possible behavioural responses to academic stress.

Difficulty making progress on academic work. In several cases, participants often described how academic stress affected specific aspects of their academics. Five graduate students claimed a response to academic stress was experiencing difficulty making progress on work. One of these students suggested he or she "[works] less efficiently," while another claimed, "sometimes I just stare at the assignment I'm writing without inspiration." The notion of having difficulty progressing with academic work was similarly discussed by teacher education students, one of whom claimed academic stress "reduces efficiency in working and organizational skills." A behaviour that may be linked to this notion of having difficulty making progress on work while experiencing academic stress is having difficulty concentrating. One graduate student suggested he or she recognized when academic stress was being experienced due to an "inability to focus well on those around me and what they're saying or doing," while a teacher education student similarly stated people who are academically stressed "need to have something said to them more times than normal in order for them to understand." In terms of how difficulty with concentration affects a student in class, one teacher education student claimed:

> In seminar and lectures it depends on whether the stress is coming from that particular class or not of whether I will open up or shut down. If I am in class A and am worried about class B I will probably shut down completely from class A topics because I'll be too concerned about class B topics.

Therefore, a student may have difficulty making progress on work due to his or her lack of concentration, and additionally, students may be disengaged from classes.

Procrastinating/prioritizing. Participants from both groups also addressed how they may avoid sources of stress, such as schoolwork. Two graduate students claimed they would procrastinate to avoid working on something that caused them stress and teacher education students reported similar behaviours. For example, one teacher education student said, "when I am too overwhelmed I shut down. I will spend an entire evening watching movies rather than working which will actually add to my level of stress later." While some may avoid doing work that causes stress, other participants suggested that prioritizing tasks was necessary, and this sometimes meant certain tasks would be set aside. As one teacher education student claimed "papers would be neglected and pushed to the last minute because other assignments took over." The topics of decreased efficiency, difficulty concentrating, procrastinating, and prioritizing are therefore linked in the way that they negatively affect the completion of academic responsibilities. These topics are also linked to the data that suggested students may be unprepared for class and have increased absenteeism as a result of academic stress.

Unprepared for class/ increased absenteeism. Participants in both groups emphasized that academic stress affected them in a variety of ways such as being unprepared for class. One teacher education student suggested, "in seminars, academic stress effects your performance since it may be more difficult for you to participate," which may be due to being unprepared for class. In addition to being unprepared for class as a result of academic stress, some participants also claimed they may not attend seminars or lectures. One graduate student claimed a result of stress was "increasing absenteeism and no responses to enquiries," while a teacher education student claimed, "when it comes to seminars or lectures I will be more likely to skip classes if I am

stressed out." While these participants did not suggest why they were more likely to skip if they were experiencing stress, one teacher education student provided insight into a possible rationale: "I would simply not go to class because I knew I'd be expected to know something about readings that I just didn't have enough time to review or read."

Other behaviours that link to the topics of decreased efficiency, lack of concentration, procrastinating and prioritizing, and being unprepared for class/increased absenteeism include missing deadlines and editing papers far beyond expectations. Also, one participant from each group suggested disorganization was the result of being stressed, and both groups also highlighted poor absorption of information. As one teacher education student said, "inability to retain course material" is a response to academic stress. This demonstrates that there are a variety of behavioural responses to stress and how each student responds to stress can differ.

Verbal expression of stress. In addition to the various behaviours that directly relate to academics, participants from both groups also suggested that a response to stress might involve verbally expressing concerns. For example, one graduate student said, "people may express their feelings of being overwhelmed," while another suggested "I know when others are experiencing academic stress because they express it (verbally)." Teacher education students voiced similar responses, as is demonstrated by one student who claimed, "they complain about the amount of work that they have to complete." Another teacher education student suggested that students who are stressed "ask a lot of questions to their peers and not the profs." Therefore, although students may verbalize their concerns to someone when they are experiencing academic stress they may only verbalize concerns to peers, and this may not be an appropriate source of support.

Strain in social and family life. In addition to behaviours directly related to academics, and the verbal expression of stress, other behavioural responses that result from academic stress are related to life outside of academics. Participants from both groups suggested that academic stress can often result in an imbalance in work-life and that a person's quality of personal life may suffer. Participants suggested family life is negatively affected by academic stress, and that this is caused by the need to focus entirely on academics. One graduate student discussed his or her behaviour when experiencing academic stress: "I cannot focus on anything but my schoolwork but do not succeed in finishing it anyways." A teacher education student expressed a similar concern with regards to focusing solely on academics "when no one has time to do anything but go to school and study." As a result of having to focus solely on academics, participants suggested other aspects of their life must be sacrificed. One graduate student claimed, "people may cancel plans with friends/social events because academic stress is weighing them down," while a teacher education student reported a similar conclusion "they cannot find time for things that would normally happen in their week (grocery shopping, working out, spending a night with a friend/boyfriend)." While balancing different responsibilities is something that can be learned over time, as one teacher education student points out, the result of changing conditions means that time management skills must be consistently revisited: "In previous years I was better able to balance work and social life. So far this year I see no time when having a social life will be remotely possible." This suggests that as responsibilities shift and the academic year progresses, adapting to the changing conditions is often required.

Other behavioural responses. Several participants from both groups commented on how academic stress can cause people to become cranky, short-tempered, and on edge. One graduate student claimed academic stress was "when you start acting moody to people you care about," while a teacher education student similarly claimed to know when he or she was experiencing stress because of the tendency to be "rude to people I love." Another teacher education student claimed academic stress "makes people less likely to listen or tolerate other people." Other responses that were less frequently reported included feeling fidgety, staying up late, being withdrawn in seminars and lecture, and "depending on substances (legal and illegal)." Consequently, when people are experiencing academic stress there may often be behavioural responses that can be observed.

Behavioural responses to stress revealed in the data consisted of difficulty making progress on academic work, procrastinating/prioritizing, and being unprepared for class or increasing absenteeism. This section also discussed how several of these behavioural responses might be associated with emotional responses. Another theme generated from the responses included verbal expression of stress, whereby participants express their experiences with peers. Lastly, a behavioural response to stress included the strain that is placed on participants' social and family life.

Effect on Surrounding Environment

Although not a frequently discussed topic, several teacher education students commented on the effect that students' stress has on the surrounding area. For example, one student claimed, "the surroundings and area people are in become very tense." Another teacher education student suggested, "interactions tend to decrease due to the

easily irritated and stress contagious syndrome!" In terms of the environment therefore, the area may become tense as students engage in discussions about stress, and consequently, this may increase stress levels which one student termed "stress contagious syndrome."

In summation, emotional, physical, and behavioural responses were prominently revealed by both participant groups. In terms of emotional responses, feelings of inadequacy/hopelessness, anxiety, and being overwhelmed/under pressure were the main themes that participants discussed. Changes in sleeping and eating patterns, as well as difficulty with concentration, were presented in this section according to the physical responses participants highlighted. Behavioural responses included difficulty making progress on academic work, procrastinating/prioritizing, being unprepared for class and having increased absenteeism, verbally expressing stress, and having strain in social and family life. Lastly, this section discussed the effect that stress may have on the surrounding environment according to participants' suggestions. The overlapping nature of these responses was also discussed in terms of how a response in one area may lead to a response in another. While this overlapping nature contributes to students responding to stressors in different ways, the topic of different levels of stress also adds to the various ways a person might respond.

Levels of Stress

In addition to causes of and responses to stress, participants also described the level of stress they experienced. Responses were grouped according to whether they described low, moderate, or high levels of stress. Furthermore, data from both participant groups revealed the themes of fluctuation, specifically in terms of stress levels, as well as

the theme of increased stress levels. Additionally, the theme of coping skills affecting stress levels was also shown.

Low Level of Stress

Few participants described their stress as being on a lower level. One graduate student suggested he/she experienced "not too much," while another claimed, "I think I experience academic stress minimally. I am typically confident in my studies and abilities." A teacher education student similarly stated, "I think I experienced a high level in earlier years, but have learned to manage it better. I would say I feel a low-moderate amount now." In addition to few participants describing their stress as being low, even fewer participants suggested they did not experience stress. Only one graduate student addressed his or her stress level as being none: "Recently, quite a bit… currently none." Although one student suggested he or she was currently experiencing no academic stress, the low frequency of students who claimed they had no stress would suggest that most students experience at least some stress at any given time. Furthermore, the low frequency of participants who claimed they experience a low level of stress would support the suggestion that most of the participants experience moderate-high levels of stress.

Moderate Level of Stress

Several participants from both groups described their level of stress as moderate. In a discussion of the level of stress they experienced, one teacher education student suggested, "medium, was able to look ahead and calm self," while another teacher education participant claimed to experience, "a moderate level through the term, with high stress occurring before assignments are due and before tests or presentations."

Graduate students similarly described their stress level as moderate. For example, one student claimed, “I experienced much more stress last year. This year I feel ok. Stress has not gone over a 5-out-of-10 approximately.” Another graduate student echoed this statement by stating, “I would say on average 60% of the time I’m worried about something related to school.”

In addition to participants from both groups suggesting they experienced a moderate level of stress, several participants also emphasized that a moderate level of stress can have positive effects. One teacher education student claimed, “moderate stress can have a positive effect as it can help to motivate me to stay on task for fear of getting off track.” Other participants similarly suggested this notion of a moderate level of stress enhancing a student’s motivation. For example, one teacher education student claimed, “when stress is mild, I think it can help your performance, by lending a sense of urgency and importance,” while a graduate student suggested a moderate level of stress was “motivation. It’s normal in life.” This demonstrates that at the moderate level, stress can sometimes result in a positive response. However, stress can also reach a high level, which then often has a negative effect on students. Although the frequency of students discussing a moderate level of stress was higher in comparison to students who described a low level of stress, most students referred to their level of stress as being in the high range.

High Level of Stress

Half of the graduate student respondents described their level of stress as falling within the high range, which one participant suggested was considered 85% or higher on a 0-100 scale. One graduate student described his or her level of stress as “the highest

level of stress I have yet experienced," while another claimed, "currently, I believe I am experiencing a significant amount of academic stress that is much more than in my undergraduate experience." As they described their high level of stress, several participants also described the negative effect that this stress was having. "I started to have an anxiety disorder and even experienced mood fluctuations," suggested one graduate student, while another claimed, "I would say a great deal. I have become quite ill during the course of my academic studies, and the stress brought on by involvement in academic life makes it very difficult to stop, relax, and gain perspective." Many teacher education students similarly described their level of stress as high. One student described his or her stress as falling within the "high end of spectrum" while several other participants suggested they experienced a high degree of stress. In addition to most participants suggesting they experienced a moderate-high level of stress, many also addressed how their stress fluctuates.

Fluctuating Levels of Stress

In addition to participants describing their level of stress on a range from low to high, many participants also suggested that their level of stress would fluctuate. One graduate student suggested stress "comes in waves," while another student similarly claimed, "during my postsecondary education I have experienced varied amounts of academic stress with some times being greater than others." A teacher education student also described when he or she experiences academic stress: "from September to April, every single day to varying degrees." In addition to several students claiming their stress levels fluctuated, some participants described when they would experience higher levels

of stress, and when they might experience lower levels of stress. For example, this graduate student described how stress had changed:

> I definitely experience academic stress but I experience it in varying degrees depending on the time of year or the amount of work and assignments I have to complete. I would say that when I'm close to due dates, I feel a great deal of academic stress. When I am just focusing on research and doing readings my stress level is moderate to low.

Teacher education participants similarly discussed when they would experience higher and lower levels of stress. For example, one participant claimed "it was very stressful at certain times of the year (midterms and finals)," while another suggested, "naturally, the stress is less at the beginning and end of the term while in the middle it is at the greatest (that's where a lot of midterms and papers are due)." In addition to some participants highlighting how their stress fluctuates and when their stress is high or low, one participant addressed how one can anticipate stress and prepare for it. The participant suggested:

> How you choose to prepare for/handle the stress—I think that one of the main aspects of 'preparing' for academic stress is realizing that it will happen…and that it'll be ok… that there are supports out there to help ensure you will get through it… because you WILL get through it…and if you don't, you are just as worthy as a person than if you did.

This participant therefore suggests that stress is something people should be prepared to experience.

Increased stress. While many students discussed how stress levels fluctuated, a common theme in the data was the increase in stress that students were experiencing. Several graduate students suggested they were experiencing much more stress than in previous years. One graduate student in particular noted that he or she has discussed the increasing stress with faculty:

> Recently in the M.Ed. program I have experienced a greater amount of academic stress than usual. When I have discussed this with some faculty I have been told that this is a normal part of the stage I am at in my studies.

Another graduate similarly notes his or her increasing stress:

> I have always been an honour roll student, so I feel I must have developed some successful academic stress coping skills over the years, but graduate school is a nightmare. That is sad to hear myself say, because I have always liked school. Speaking specifically as a graduate student, AS has only increased as I mentioned, affecting my practice as a researcher and writer.

While this participant noted that coping skills were developed throughout postsecondary experiences, he or she also suggested that what was being experienced in the current graduate program possibly exceeds what the personal coping skills are able to manage. In addition to graduate students noting their increase in stress, several graduate students also suggested a relationship between increasing responsibilities and their increase in stress. For example, one graduate student claimed, “My stress has increased as my demands increased,” and another stated, “Yes it has increased. Because I have to now balance school with family obligations, work, and friendships.” Participants therefore suggested that the levels of stress not only could fluctuate throughout the year, but also increase as

they progress through their postsecondary education due to a higher number of responsibilities.

Intervening Factor: Coping Skills

In addition to some students discussing an increase in stress, many also suggested the ability to manage the increase because of personal coping skills. One teacher education student suggested, "it increased but I learnt how to deal with it and manage my stress" while another student claimed, "yes, it has grown from year to year yet I have become more accustom to it as well. I can handle academic stress much better now than I did in first year." Graduate students did not discuss the development of coping skills as frequently as teacher education students. One student, however, did discuss a strategy he/she used to help manage their stress: "I think I experience academic stress to a lesser degree then most individuals as I stay fairly calm under pressure and try to maintain a balanced lifestyle/take care of myself accordingly." Coping skills were therefore discussed as an intervening factor that could help minimize the effects of increasing levels of stress, and which could help students keep their stress at a moderate level.

In addition to low, moderate, and high stress levels being described in this section, the themes of fluctuating stress and increased stress were also discussed. Participants suggested their stress fluctuated throughout the year, largely due to when deadlines and exams were. Although several participants suggested their stress had increased throughout their postsecondary experience, many suggested they most frequently experienced a moderate level of stress, with coping skills being a large factor in intervening and preventing stress from escalating. However, as some participants suggested, sometimes stress does reach a high level.

Conceptualizing "Help-Seeking" for Academic Stress

Participants described what they perceived as being "help-seeking" and in doing so, provided responses that could be categorized according to whether they addressed (a) an emotional component or (b) a behavioural component.

Emotional Component

Several participants highlighted aspects of emotions in their descriptions of what help-seeking meant. As one graduate student suggested, help-seeking meant "personally recognizing that there is an issue to address," which therefore suggests that the person who is experiencing stress needs to personally recognize that their stress is a concern. Some of the emotions highlighted by participants in their descriptions included curiosity, a sense of desperation, weakness/defeat, and embarrassment. A teacher education student suggested that part of help-seeking was "being curious or desperate enough to research options to lessen stress." Similarly addressing a person's own acknowledgement of personal stress is another teacher education student who said help-seeking means "that when I can't handle my own stress and I know that trying to keep it to myself isn't making things better." While these participants highlight an aspect of help-seeking that involves personally acknowledging your need for support, some participants highlighted the negative emotions that stem from making this acknowledgement. Here, one graduate student discusses what help-seeking meant to them: "Initially weakness or defeat. I would feel embarrassed to rely on assistance from others instead of resolving stress myself." A teacher education student similarly addressed this notion of weakness or defeat:

> That I cannot handle the stress. To me "seeking help" is looking for a way out. Tears will only get you sympathy. Sweat will get you results. In this situation I

> imagine "seeking help" as asking a professor to lighten my load or give me extensions which I have never and will never do.

This quotation, combined with other participants' responses, highlight how one aspect of help-seeking is related to psychologically recognizing that support is needed. In some cases, however, a person who is distressed may not be willing or able to accept that he or she needs support, and personal help-seeking behaviours may change as a result.

Behavioural Component

As participants identified what help-seeking meant to them and how they responded to academic stress, many responses identified both individual behavioural coping strategies as well as strategies and supports they used that involved people or resources in their personal support network. One teacher education student suggested that "trying new strategies" was a step towards seeking help and managing academic stress. Strategies, in this case, could be considered both skills that are personal or involving others. Another teacher education student similarly voiced how seeking help can involve behaviours that are considered individual coping strategies or coping strategies that involve sources from a person's personal support network: "finding something that you can do to reduce stress (journaling or talking to others)." As such, both individual coping strategies and external support seeking are discussed in this section.

Individual behavioural coping strategies. One of the themes that graduate students identified in describing individual coping strategies was the use of physical activity. Several graduate students suggested that engaging in physical activity helped them relieve stress. One graduate student claimed, "I use physical activity to help relieve stress such as working out, fitness classes, yoga, or meditation." Another graduate student

similarly suggested:

> The only thing that has helped to clear my mind and shut off my brain is yoga. There is scientific research to support that the breathing exercises are effective to shut off the part of the brain that is responsible for creating anxiety and worry. But this is only temporary. I then go back into the environment that provokes the stress.

While these students suggested that physical activity is a temporary method for coping and managing stress, others students similarly suggested temporary methods of relieving or managing stress such as praying and "taking natural health stress relief."

Several students also discussed actions they took in terms of managing their various academic activities, in an effort to relieve some stress. For example, one teacher education student suggested keeping a highly organized agenda was helpful, while another teacher education student claimed, "writing down everything that is part of your stress and providing an agenda for how to accomplish each task" was an effective method for taking steps towards reducing academic stress. While some participants commented on writing down the various responsibilities they had to manage, another teacher education student commented on the way writing can help manage stress: "I normally write down my frustrations as a way to release them." However, while individual behavioural coping strategies might be used and developed as students experience stress, sometimes students have to seek support from other sources in order to manage their stress.

External support from personal support network. Many students conceptualized help-seeking by describing the type of support that is needed when they

did seek help as well as what they hoped to receive from the person they went to for help. Several students highlighted that the process of seeking help involved moving beyond one's own coping skills and involving other people. A teacher education student defined the help-seeking process as "actively approaching anyone in your personal support system." One graduate student similarly described seeking help as approaching someone, but also adds another component: "Seeking help means to me to go looking for 'help' because one is in need of help (assistance from someone/something) because they are unable to address/meet their needs themselves." Here, the graduate student suggested that seeking help means extending outside of using personal coping skills, and furthermore, that the reason one may be seeking help is because he or she was unable to manage the stress themselves. The student therefore suggested there is a transition from using one's own coping skills to involving others. The following section therefore presents the various sources of support that participants identified, which may be commonly used after individual behavioural coping skills have been exhausted.

Friends/classmates. Seventeen teacher education students and 15 graduate students discussed seeking support from friends or classmates. This was the most frequently reported source of support for the participants, with family/significant other being the next most reported source. One graduate student identified some of the characteristics that make friends/classmates a frequently used source of support: "the most common place I seek help from is my peers whom I consider friends because I trust them to not only help me find a solution to my stress, but also that they care about me." Additionally, a teacher education student suggested that support is provided by "peers that I am close with (on academic and emotional level)." This participant highlights that

friends/classmates are in a position where they can connect on both an academic and an emotional level.

Despite friends and classmates being the most frequently reported source of support, this does not necessarily mean that this is a useful or effective source of support. As one teacher education student suggested, "you can complain to friends etc., but that only helps vent. It doesn't eliminate stress." Similarly, in discussion addressing where students seek help from, another teacher education student commented "I think we seek it quietly from friends on a regular basis as we vent and complain about the mounds of work to complete." In this case, while discussing the amount of work that needs to be completed is certainly a first step in seeking support, whether it is the best source to receive support from is arguable. One graduate student further supports this notion that friends may not be the most effective or useful support: "totally not there at all, don't understand." As such, although friends and classmates were the most frequently reported source of support, a small number of comments also pinpointed some of the difficulties that may be associated with seeking support from this source.

However, although there may be some limitations to seeking support from friends and classmates, several graduate students suggested that a mentorship program could be beneficial in terms of seeking support. As one of the graduate students suggested:

> I think I would appreciate a mentorship type program as an alternative so that I could seek advice from students who have been in the program longer and taken the classes. They have a students' perspective on the questions and worries I have, and would be able to empathize with the academic stress I'm feeling.

This type of support may therefore be a balance between providing the emotional support

that a classmate/friend provides, while also providing significant academic support.

Family/significant other. The second most frequently reported source of support was family and significant others. Sixteen teacher education students and 13 graduate students discussed seeking support from family members. Of the 16 teacher education students who identified family as a source of support, six specifically mentioned seeking support from a parent.

Few participants discussed their significant other as being a source of support. One graduate student and three teacher education students identified a partner as supporting them. A teacher education student claimed "my boyfriend (on an emotional level)." In this case, the participant identified how different sources of support provided different types of support, whether academic or emotional, and considered the partner as being a source of emotional support. The graduate student who discussed a significant other suggested "I may ask my spouse for assistance (in the form of an additional opinion or direction on a topic, or physical help (please make dinner as I don't have time)." Here, the participant not only suggested that the significant other provided assistance by helping with balancing academics and other responsibilities, but also in the form of academic support.

Likeliness of seeking informal support. Many students from both participant groups indicated that they would be likely to seek informal support, rather than professional support. Informal support was considered as being someone in their immediate support system, such as a family member, significant other, or friend. Not only do several students discuss their use of informal support, but the likeness of seeking this informal support is also mentioned. A teacher education student suggested, "friends,

family, classmates, significant others, highly likely when stress is 7/10." One graduate student emphasized that he or she relied on this informal support rather than formal: "sometimes I'll ask another student to read through an assignment before I submit it, but nothing more than that." This notion of seeking informal support is also discussed by teacher education students, one of whom claimed "we seek informal help by ranting to one another but nothing serious." While these participants illustrate that students may be more likely to seek informal rather than professional support, what the students expect or receive from their informal support may differ, whereas one student claimed he/she went to another student to review an assignment, another suggested students discussed their issues amongst each other. Although some students emphasized that the extent of help-seeking they would engage in was solely informal support, other students suggested that they were simply more likely to seek informal rather than formal. One graduate student claimed, "when experiencing stress in academics I am more likely to talk to a loved one or take a short break as opposed to seeking a professional for guidance." As such, there may be circumstances that would lead a person in these cases to seek professional support.

However, although friends/classmates and family/significant other were the most frequently identified sources of support, the effectiveness of these supports needs to be taken into consideration. While seeking support from a family member or partner may be effective support for some, for others it may "do more harm than good," as one graduate student suggested. Many participants maintained that there were some difficulties with seeking support from these sources. One graduate student grouped family and friends together and identified a concern that addressed both sources of supports: "My family

and friends are not as supportive as I thought. I don't have the patience to wait until they fully understand my situation." A teacher education student similarly pinpointed that there may be limitations to seeking informal support: "Would only talk to a close family member and there is usually not much they can do." Consequently, although participants most commonly seek support from sources in their immediate personal support system, such as friends and family, the effectiveness of these supports is often questioned.

Academic supports. Several sources of support that participants identified were grouped under the heading Academic Supports, because these are typically sources of support that students would go to for specific academic concerns. As one teacher education student suggested, students are often "seeking specific academic, skill-building type help," and as a result they may go to several sources of academic support, such as seminars offered by the university (i.e., strategies on how to research efficiently). In terms of other sources of academic support, one teacher education participant identified a tutor, while another suggested: "my teaching assistants (on an academic level)" are a source of support. One participant from each participant group also identified library staff as a source of support. Additionally, several students identified administrators in the department as people that they could contact. For example, one graduate student suggested the Chair of the Department could be a source of support.

However, there may be some hesitation associated with using these avenues for help. In this case, one graduate student suggested "I have sent some emails to coordinators, but feel more like an inconvenience to them asking too many questions." That being said, this is still a step towards seeking help. Although few students identified these academic sources of support, they are still worth acknowledging due to their

existence in the university environment.

The main source of academic support that students identified was professors. Eleven graduate students and 7 teacher education students suggested that a professor could be a source of support for students experiencing academic stress. In addition to many students identifying professors, two participants from each participant group also acknowledged that their faculty advisor or research supervisor was a source of support. Several of the students who identified faculty as sources of support also mentioned what kind of support they might ask a professor for. For example, one graduate student suggested "clarifying with the professor" was a good method of seeking help, while a teacher education claimed "talking to a professor to lighten load or get extensions" was another way of seeking support. While these are only two examples of how students could make use of professors that are in their personal support system, the frequency of professors being identified as a source of support indicates their prominent position as a support for students. Also worth noting is the suggestion of one teacher education student whom mentions that not only are professors a source of support, but also, that professors can be helpful in their position as a source of support: "When the professor asks how people are feeling and retain no judgment on students who are truthful." This quotation highlights that while many students identify professors as a source of support, their willingness to seek support from them may be affected by how they respond.

Professional support. The last types of support that students identified were grouped under Professional Support. Seven graduate students and three teacher education students identified professional support as a general group of supports that students could seek support from. In addition, nine graduate students identified professional support as a

psychologist, counsellor, or therapist, while eight teacher education students identified these same supports. One graduate student suggested, “if you are experiencing academic stress, I think seeking a personal counsellor would be seeking help, whereas going to the gym would not necessarily be seeking help.” This participant differentiates between the use of personal coping strategies and support that is gained from a personal support system.

Another source of support, a Student Development Centre, was also discussed. Student Development Centres also provide services such as personal counselling for students. However, despite the various services Student Development Centres may provide, only three graduate students and one teacher education student identified them as a source of help. One graduate student suggested:

> In the past I’ve made use of [institution’s] Student Development Centre and Health Services to help me with depression and anxiety. While those are excellent services, they cannot really help me with anxiety and academic stress I feel related to uncertainties in the program.

This participant suggested that although the Student Development Centre and Health Services may provide specific support for issues such as anxiety and depression, which may be related to academics, they may not provide the specific academic support that the student requires.

In addition to students identifying psychologists, counsellors, and therapists, other supports such as health services on campus and family doctors were also highlighted. While only one graduate student mentioned health services, five graduate students and four teacher education students pinpointed doctors as a source students might use for help

related to stress. One teacher education student suggested that a component of seeking help is "knowing when you need to see a doctor to have them assess your mental health and give you 'permission' to check out of a task for a while for the betterment of your overall health." While this participant suggested seeking help from a doctor may result in taking time off from school, another teacher education student highlighted that medication is also an outcome of students who seek support from doctors: "some friends have sought medical attention and antianxiety medications." However, although medication is a solution for some students who are diagnosed as having medical concerns that may be related to stress, for others, it may not be appropriate, as is suggested by one graduate student:

> With anxiety, we are often told to go take a pill that will make you happy. But the problem is a lot of people do not want to take medication. So they begin self-medicating. If they are lucky, they will find something that works. Yet, aside from abstaining from schoolwork, I have yet to find an enduring solution that is easy to swallow.

This participant highlights that one of the problems associated with seeking help is that medication may be presented as a strategy that can be used to help someone with personal difficulties. However, for some, such as this participant, medication is not a strategy that he or she is willing to be involved in. As such, students may often be uncertain of where to seek help from or unwilling to seek help from a doctor.

Participants also provided some indication of what they might be expecting when they go to someone for support. For example, one graduate student suggested he or she may need "additional assistance on assignments or questions for exams," while another

graduate student claimed, “I try to talk to those around, to vent or bounce ideas off of.” Several students from both participant groups highlighted that often they just needed someone to talk to. “I feel better when I can talk about things that are bothering me with someone who is impartial,” said one graduate student. Similarly, one teacher education said he or she dealt with academic stress by “working through it by communicating and just sharing your feelings,” while another suggested he/she would “talk about stress in general, and how you’ve been struggling to balance different aspects of life.” Although what students expect from a source of support may sometimes differ, some common expectations that were mentioned by both participant groups were:

- Advice
- Guidance
- Clarification
- Encouragement
- Comfort.

Accordingly, when students do seek support from different sources, it’s important that the support meets the expectations of the student, by addressing these characteristics.

Likeliness of seeking academic or professional support. Seeking professional support out of desperation is a theme generated from the responses that discussed seeking professional support. Respondents who indicated they had previously used professional support emphasized their desperation as they moved beyond talking to friends and family. For example, one graduate student said, “I have only sought help as a desperate last resort” and a teacher education said “to approach a prof one must be very frustrated or desperate.” Also worth noting is the sense of defeat that participants sometimes

admitted as they discussed their use of professional support, such as with one graduate student: “Sadly enough I did seek help before. It was my last resolution.” However, despite some responses indicating that students would only seek professional support if they had exhausted all other options, one teacher education participant indicated, “If extreme would go directly to professional.”

In summation, this section described both the emotional and behavioural components of help-seeking that participants addressed. Participants described emotionally coming to terms with having to seek support, in addition to suggesting there may be feelings associated with a sense of weakness. Individual behavioural coping strategies participants proposed were highlighted, and included actions such as maintaining organization and exercising. Discussion surrounding seeking support from external sources in students’ personal support network was then provided. The likeliness of participants seeking support from informal sources, such as friends/classmates, and family/significant others, in addition to formal sources, both academic and professional, were discussed. Brief discussion of factors affecting willingness to seek each type of support was provided. However, more in-depth discussion is provided in the next session.

Factors Affecting Willingness to Seek Support

In addition to the different types of informal and formal support being described, participants also suggested factors that would influence their decision to seek one type of support over another. Additionally, participants discussed factors that may deter them from seeking any type of support. Accordingly, two themes that are discussed in terms of how they relate to willingness to seek informal or formal support include participants’

use of personal coping skills and the level of stress they experience. In addition, findings surrounding the themes of accessibility/awareness of support and effectiveness of/prior experience with support are presented. Lastly, social-emotional concerns and stigma are discussed as the last factor affecting students' willingness to seek support.

Use of Personal Coping Skills

One theme that was generated based on participants' comments with regards to seeking help was that they tended to try and use personal coping skills prior to seeking any source of support. In some cases, however, participants suggested they would be extremely unlikely to seek support because of their reliance on personal coping skills. For example, one teacher education student suggested he or she was, "unlikely to seek help because I am not good at asking for help from anyone. I normally write down my frustrations as a way to release them." In most cases, however, participants commented on using personal coping skills first and then whether they were successful in using personal coping skills or not would determine the next course of action. "I usually try to work it out myself. If I felt I needed more assistance I would seek help," said one graduate student. Not only did students suggest their likeliness of seeking support was based on how successful their personal coping was, but they also suggested that once they recognized their personal coping wasn't effective, they then had to determine what kind of support they were going to seek. This was most often discussed in terms of seeking informal support through students' immediate support systems, such as friends and family, as one graduate student suggests:

> It depends on what kind of stress it is. For instance, if I think I can solve the problem by myself but I feel too much stress, I might just talk to my friends or

> parents to release my emotion. If I don't think I can solve the problem by myself, I might turn to my teachers to seek some practical help.

Once students seek support from informal sources, they determine whether this support is effective and whether they need to seek other support. Several participants suggested that if informal supports were not effective, they may move towards other sources such as a professor, counsellor, or other professional support. One graduate student highlighted this process:

> I believe I have been accustomed to dealing with my academic stress on my own. However, recently I believe I would be more likely to seek help. For example, talking with friends and family about my academic stress. If this does not work then I possibly would try other ways of seeking help.

Level of Stress

The level of stress a person is experiencing links to the use of personal coping skills. As one graduate student pointed out, "the level of stress that one person can cope with will ultimately vary." Consequently, the point at which one person may seek support due to the level of stress that is experienced may differ from that of another.

Several students discussed how they would be unlikely to seek support due to a low level of stress. Furthermore, these participants also noted that if they were experiencing a limited amount of stress, this was the type of stress for which they would use their personal coping methods. One teacher education student, for example, suggests, "if lower than 7/10 rarely seek help because you deal with it on your own." Similarly, graduate students also discussed this tendency to deal with low levels of stress on their own. One graduate student participant said "I don't think students are very likely to seek

help; I think most try to work through it on their own." Another graduate student commented on their personal likelihood of seeking support: "Probably not at all. I wouldn't as I'm very self aware and deal with stress well, mainly through physical activity."

On the other hand, a high level of stress was suggested to have a strong influence on willingness to seek help. Participants from both the Master of Education program as well as the teacher education program provided similar insight into the theme that often, seeking support is the result of being overwhelmed or desperate. One teacher education student claimed, "I think you seek help only because you cannot figure out what else to do," while another suggested, "you can only let it eat away at you for so long before you have to do something to vent it," and lastly, "a feeling that you just can't do it yourself anymore."

Accordingly, on one hand participants suggested that if their stress level was low they would likely use personal coping skills to manage the stress; on the other hand, if stress level is high then personal coping skills may not be sufficient, and other types of support may therefore be required.

Accessibility and Awareness of Effective Support

In addition to the level of stress affecting likeliness of seeking support, the accessibility and awareness of support also plays a significant role in whether a student will seek help for stress-related issues. One teacher education student highlighted that "primarily, being informed about where to seek help, as well as having this information presented in a welcoming and comfortable way" affects willingness to seek support. In most cases, however, participants discussed accessibility and awareness of support in

terms of what was lacking or missing, and therefore highlighted how these topics negatively affect willingness. Although one teacher education student claimed that a barrier to seeking support was "not having the resources to seek help," several participants, instead, noted the lack of awareness regarding existing supports. One graduate student expressed their concerns that the "knowledge of 'help' available for academic stress does not particularly exist." A teacher education student supported this idea, but added another issue "New students are afraid and unsure about seeking help, as well as uninformed about who to ask." In this case, the lack of willingness to seek help is compounded by a lack of information about where to go for support.

In addition to students noting the lack of awareness regarding existing supports, some participants voiced concerns related to the accessibility of support. For example, one graduate student claimed a barrier to seeking support was "services not available for some at no cost." Another graduate student similarly addressed concerns related to accessibility:

> accessibility of said help (if aware of it and it does exist) may not be feasible for some (i.e., if it is on campus and I am writing my paper at home, or I work when help is available at given times.

Issues related to accessibility and awareness were therefore prominently discussed by participants in both groups. Some participants discussed the importance of information about support being readily available, while others supported this notion by addressing why some students may not be seeking support.

One graduate student encompasses the importance awareness, accessibility, and effectiveness of support in his or her statement that addresses likeliness of seeking

support: “Not likely until the help has been established. We already feel busy enough, we don’t want to ‘waste our time’ seeking unhelpful answers. We need to know where to go and when for different issues.” This participant summarizes the responses of others by illustrating some of the issues surrounding the accessibility of support.

Effectiveness of and Prior Experience With Support

In relation to effectiveness of support, prior help-seeking experience was also a theme that was presented in the data. One graduate student noted the effect that prior experience has in terms of how experience can affect your willingness to seek help:

> A major factor in my willingness to seek help for my academic stress comes from my experiences in suffering from excessive anxiety and depression when I did not seek help. Understanding your limits is very important, as it allows you to know when you need to seek help. Reaching my breaking point has caused me to understand when I need to seek help.

While in this case the student recognizes personal limits due to his/her prior experience with different levels of stress, other participants similarly noted how prior experience with help-seeking can affect willingness to seek support. As one teacher education student suggested, having positive experiences with seeking help does influence your likeliness of seeking help: “I am likely to seek because I have learned the benefits over time.” A different teacher education student highlighted some additional considerations in terms of past experiences:

> I think the likelihood of someone seeking help depends on his or her experience with it in the past (was it always viewed as a positive option, were people willing to be helpful in the past, did having help from different people end up helping you

in the long run?)

While several participants highlighted how positive past experiences can encourage succeeding help-seeking, other participants addressed the effect that negative experiences can have on subsequent help-seeking behaviours. As one graduate student suggested, “yes the school offers free counselling, and while they are helpful to some, it was hardly helpful for me when the one told me my problems fell outside of their comfort zone.” In a similar way, some participants highlighted that even though a certain help-seeking experience may not be negative, it may also not be an appropriate or effective source of support for that particular person. For example, one teacher education student claimed, “I have talked to counsellors in the past, but did not find that effective for me.” Similarly, one graduate student discontinued counselling because it did not provide the support that he or she needed: “I would see people here and there, but when they had little to offer that created meaningful change, it was not something I sustained.” As such, while positive prior experiences may lead to students continuing to use certain supports, negative experiences may also deter students from using certain supports.

Social-Emotional Concerns and Stigma

Participants often mentioned what they required from the source of support when they were willing to access it. Some of the characteristics both participant groups suggested the sources of support should possess included:

- Trustworthiness
- Being non-judgmental
- Impartiality
- Empathy

- Being a good listener.

One issue that participants from both groups addressed concerns trust: “It takes trust to talk to someone about a personal problem and some people have trouble doing that.” Similarly, a graduate student claimed, “trust in the person you are seeking help from is also important.” However, participants did not expand and discuss why trust was a contributing factor to willingness to seek support.

One teacher education student claimed “feeling ashamed or embarrassed” was a factor affecting willingness, while a graduate student similar reported, “fear of feeling embarrassed to ask for help.” A suggestion for why students are afraid or too embarrassed to seek support is provided by a teacher education student who suggested, “I think people fear that they will be judged in a negative light for seeking help or that their finished product will be worth less if they had to seek help to complete it.” One graduate student echoed this sentiment of fear of being judged: “I’m always worried that I’ll ask the wrong question, or give the wrong impression, which will only result in negative consequences.” In terms of why shame, embarrassment, and fear of being judged are concerns expressed by participants relates to the topic of stigma, which was also discussed in the data from both participant groups. As one graduate student suggested, “they are afraid to go talk to somebody because they are worried about the stigma associated with asking for help.” Similarly, another graduate student suggested “I am hesitant to seek help for my academic stress from my faculty simply because I don’t want the professors/faculty to view my academic stress or anxiety as a vulnerability.” Teacher education students similarly addressed stigma, but one participant in particular also begins drawing a connection on how shame, embarrassment, and fear relate to stigma:

> Sometimes people are too afraid to discuss their stress because they feel that others are just not open to listening. For instance, Professors often do not care if you are unable to meet a deadline because you are feeling 'swamped' and being shut down by a professor adds to the stress that a student feels. Sometimes they are too afraid to seek help elsewhere because of the stigma that surrounds the field of mental health today—they are too afraid to be labeled.

The notion of stigma and fear of being judged is therefore an issue for many of the students who participated in this study.

An additional component of stigma and associated shame, embarrassment, and fear is issues related to confidentiality. One graduate student suggested how confidentiality is an issue by suggesting someone might be "worried about being seen going to the centre for student development." This notion of being concerned about being seen seeking help is similarly addressed by another graduate student:

> I think it becomes even more of a fear when you are a Master's student and you are a TA and have students on campus. People feel they don't want to be seen needing help or not being able to handle things on their own.

However, despite the voiced concerns related to the themes of shame, embarrassment, and stigma, one prominent theme that was discussed which could combat these themes was normalcy. Several participants from both groups discussed aspects of normalcy and whether this would make someone more or less willing to seek help for academic stress. In terms of making someone more willing to seek support, one teacher education student claimed, "Their ability to realize that they are not alone in their stress" could positively affect someone's willingness. Another teacher education similarly sheds

light on the notion of normalcy contributing positively to willingness to seek support: "Social conversation in general, which brings light to how common stress-related issues are, also helps to make individuals feel like there is not necessarily anything wrong with them." Some participants therefore suggested that by attributing a sense of normalcy to stress it would subsequently make students who experience issues with stress feel more "normal," and as a result they would not have as much difficulty asking for support.

On the other hand, however, some participants suggested that associating a sense of normalcy to academic stress would negatively affect students' willingness to seek support. One teacher education student highlights this concern when he/she suggested one of the things affecting willingness to seek support was: "Normalcy—everyone experiences it so why do I need help." Similarly, another teacher education student refers to normalcy and how it affects her/his likeliness to seek support: "I don't think very likely because it is downplayed as not as important as family or personal stress. I feel like because we are university (especially concurrent ed.) students it is expected that we experience stress." Graduate students discussed similar concerns with regards to not wanting to seek help because of a sense of stress being normal. This sentiment is best described by the comment provided by one graduate student who claimed willingness to seek support was affected by:

> the belief that academic stress is 'normal' or to be expected. As a result, this could limit one's willingness to seek help if they believe seeking help is something to do when you are experiencing 'abnormal' emotions. Unfortunately, I believe there is a stigma around stress and there is a perceived belief that you just need to 'suck it up' and that it will get better.

In addition to this notion of normalcy and the expectation of stress, several participants referred to the academic environment and how it contributes to a sense of stress being normal. When addressing whether he or she would seek support, one graduate student claimed, “I will but it is expected for graduate students. The university environment promotes stress-it can be subversive and toxic.” Normalcy, in relation to experiencing stress, may therefore have both positive and negative effects, and can be compounded by the university environment that one student described as being “intolerant and lacking understanding” in terms of academic stress.

Other Factors

While the abovementioned topics represent the main themes found in the data that addressed factors affecting willingness to seek support, other less frequently discussed topics were also briefly mentioned. For example, one graduate student claimed culture and family expectations play a part in willingness to seek support, while a teacher education student similarly claimed “where/how they grew up” is significant. Other participants noted financial obligations as having an impact and personality traits such as confidence and motivation. Additionally, some participants reported concerns such as the time commitment associated with seeking support. As one graduate student suggests, “I am not too likely to seek out help because of time constraints.”

In summation, this section addressed the various factors that students discussed that affect their willingness to seek different types of support. Personal coping skills may affect whether students seek support because if they are able to manage stress on their own they may be less likely to seek support. As was discussed, this links to the impact that levels of stress have, as a low level of stress is more likely to be managed with

personal coping skills than high levels of stress. With a high level of stress, personal coping skills may not be sufficient for managing the stress. Although these factors are dependent on the individual, other factors depend on the source of support, such as the accessibility and awareness of the support, and the effectiveness of the support. Effectiveness of support is also linked to the idea of prior experience with support, as positive experiences may encourage a student to continue seeking support, and negative experiences may deter a student from using that support again. Lastly, data related to social-emotional concerns and stigma were presented.

Use of E-Mental Health Components: Internet Support

When participants were asked what sources of support they used, several noted their use of the Internet as a tool that was used to individually cope with stress. As one graduate student claimed in response to sources of support he/she used: "the grand oracle of our time, 'the Internet'." Another student similarly commented on his/her use of the Internet, but added that the internet was used to get access to the Master of Education guide that was available online. When asked specifically about whether they used the Internet to find information about or support for stress, other topics were addressed such as reasons why participants did or did not use it, and these are discussed in this section.

Use of the Internet for Stress-Related Information or Support

Ten participants from the Master of Education program and 12 participants from the teacher education program claimed they had used the Internet to find information about stress or support for stress. One teacher education student suggested "I think everyone does, the Internet is an outlet and an area that you can "self-diagnose" which is not always a good thing, but sometimes puts things in perspective." A graduate student also pinpointed

one of the benefits that might be associated with using the Internet to find information about stress: “I use it more than I would speaking to someone because it means I do not have to admit to having a problem.” While these students referred to the Internet as a general source of information about stress, other students referred to specific activities they engaged in when they used the Internet for stress-related information or support.

Seven participants from the Master of Education group and seven from the teacher education group claimed they used search engines, often as a starting point to find information. Several of these participants mentioned Google specifically, such as one teacher education student who claimed, “over the years I have found most information about stress and support for stress through Google searches.” In addition to mentioning their use of search engines or Google, participants also often discussed what they were looking for in doing the online searches. One theme that emerged from the responses was that participants were seeking information about how to manage/cope with what they were experiencing. For example, one graduate student claimed, “I’ve Googled natural remedies/tips for reducing anxiety.” Similarly, another graduate student voiced “I have in the past looked up information online, via search engines, regarding stress and/or feelings of distress and how to deal with it as well as why it might be happening.” This theme of seeking information about how to manage/cope with experiences related to stress was also voiced by teacher education students, one of whom said, “yes, I Google what the problem is. See what others have found or offered as help.” Furthermore, another teacher education student addressed how the Internet was used in terms of help-seeking: “I used search engines to look up resources and clinics.”

In addressing their use of the Internet for information about and support for stress,

several students addressed freedom associated with exploring the Internet. Students are able to go wherever they need to in order to get the information or support they need, and they do so without guidance of where to go. For example, one graduate student suggests, “I use Google to connect me to a host of information related to problems and solutions with academic anxiety. I go wherever it leads me.” In a similar way, a teacher education student also addressed the openness: “Sure. I have used the Internet a few times when feeling particularly stressed out. I would just do a simple Google search to see what comes up and then go from there.” These participants therefore suggested that when using the Internet to look for information or support related to stress they may not have a specific website that they visit to get this specific information. Instead, they rely on search engines such as a Google to provide the most relevant sources according to their search terms.

While using the Google searches to start looking for stress-related information and support may be beneficial for some students, a small number of participants pinpointed a setback of using this resource. One teacher education student commented on their use of Google, but also noted some of the setbacks that are sometimes experienced online: “I have used Google in the past to look up this information, but it gets a little intimidating with all the blogs, chat groups, and online support systems.” Therefore, while many participants described their use of the Internet for stress-related information and support, the weaknesses of this type of resource was also noted.

While the previous-mentioned participants commented on their use of search engines such as Google to seek information about or support for stress, which would involve going wherever the Internet led them, other participants discussed specific resources they used online. For example, two graduate students mentioned using online

chat rooms. One of these students stated "There is a flash chat centered around depression where one can go to discuss their stress/mental health issues. The chat is anonymous and individuals go on everyday from different parts of the world." Additionally, several students pinpointed specific websites they would visit, such as Encouragement today and Facebook (*n*=3). One graduate student suggested he/she would use Facebook groups: "I would vent to friends on Facebook to hear how others experience stress so that you do not feel like you are the only one."

Accordingly, while some students reported the use of the Internet was beneficial to find stress-related information or support, mainly through Google, others highlighted the specific resources they use on the Internet. As noted, however, there are setbacks associated with using the Internet for stress-related information or support, such as the overwhelming nature of the Internet itself.

No Use of Internet for Stress-Related Information or Support

Twelve Master of Education students and 11 teacher education students said they did not use the Internet to find information about or support for stress. As one graduate student suggested, "No. I use the Internet for research, corresponding email but not for health or stress related support." Although most participants did not expand on why they did not use the Internet as a source of information about or support for stress, a few participants suggested that the Internet was a tool that they used to procrastinate: "No, I use the Internet to procrastinate," said one teacher education student. A graduate student also voiced how the Internet was a tool that enabled procrastination: "I might use the Internet to escape my stress, by social media or gaming, but I would not say that the

Internet supports me, it only enables me to procrastinate and push the stress aside for limited amounts of time."

Accordingly, while several students note the positive aspects of using the Internet for stress-related information or support, others note that they do not use it largely due to its use for avoiding schoolwork. However, although some may use the Internet to procrastinate, the number of students who claimed they use it for stress-related information or support is noteworthy. In particular, the use of Google as a starting point to find this information or support is significant.

Willingness to Use E-Counselling

This section first discusses the perceptions of participants who claimed they would be willing to use e-counselling. Their willingness to use e-counselling was justified by this source of support's ability to address social-emotional concerns and stigma, accessibility issues, and anonymity/confidentiality. These themes are presented prior to discussion of factors that deter participants from claiming they would use e-counselling. Themes addressed in the deterrents section includes the use of personal coping skills, use of face-to-face support or support from closer connections, and time constraints.

Willing to Use E-Counselling

Eight participants from the Master of Education program and seven participants from the teacher education program stated that they would be willing to use e-counselling. Several participants among those who would be willing to use this support also cited reasons why this form of support would be suitable.

Addresses social-emotional concerns and stigma. One theme that stemmed from reasons why students would be willing to use this support related to the assumed reduction in stigma in the online environment. For example, one graduate student claimed:

> Absolutely! I think it would be a great option to have. ... It also provides people in the program who may not feel comfortable going to a counsellor's office on campus the opportunity to get the help they need without worrying about the stigma associated with it.

Similarly addressing stigma is another graduate student: "it is less stigmatizing if you're expressing yourself to a screen and also there is no paper trail of you seeking mental health support." This link to reducing stigma is also found in comments from teacher education students, one of whom states that he/she would seek support from the online method because "often, students are too afraid to speak up because they do not want to be judged for (a) where they have come from (b) why they are feeling stressed (c) who they are." As such, the online method of receiving counselling provides an alternative to face-to-face support that allows participants to seek support when they otherwise may not.

Accessibility. Other students who claimed they would be willing to use online support highlighted the theme of accessibility as a reason that affected their willingness. One graduate student for example claimed, "yes [I would use online e-counselling] because I have sought counselling and it is very expensive." Similarly, another graduate student addresses the accessibility in terms of availability: "Having counselling online would allow the opportunity for me to get the assistance I need on my schedule." Another

adds reference to the importance of awareness in terms of making students aware that this type of support is available:

> I suspect that if I was aware of this type of help being available, I would more than likely take advantage of the support at times. I think a perhaps talking things through with someone (via e-counselling), (especially if a person doesn't have anyone in their personal lives that they feel they could talk to), could be quite beneficial.

A teacher education student echoes this concern regarding awareness; "I think it would be a good idea if it was known to be available." In this case, participants note the manner in which e-counselling would address their concerns related to accessibility, where face-to-face support may be inaccessible.

Anonymity/confidentiality. Additionally, several participants cited conditions that had to be met in order to participate in this form of online support. The first stipulation that participants highlighted addressed the notion of anonymity and confidentiality. One graduate student, for example, asserted, "I believe I would consider e-mailing a counsellor if I could be certain that the information would remain anonymous and if my identity could remain anonymous." Another proposed stipulation that would affect willingness to use this online support surrounded the initial response from the support. "Yes, depending on the response I receive initially and who is on the other end of the counselling. I think I would make use of it more if I knew the person in person before I started e-mailing." While this data conflicts with the other participants' stipulations with regards to anonymity, it highlights that different students require different types of support and have different reasons and stipulations that affect their

willingness to use the supports.

Deterrents Affecting Use of E-Counselling

Just over half of the students in each participant groups claimed they would not be willing to use e-counselling. Factors that were discussed by participants as deterrents from using e-counselling as a source of support included use of personal coping skills, the use of face-to-face support or support from closer connections, and time constraints. Accordingly, each of these factors are discussed in this section.

Use of personal coping skills. One group of students within those who claimed they would not use the online support suggested that they simply did not need support: "No because I don't think I need that much support," claimed one graduate student. Others suggested that they would not seek this support partially due to their personal coping skills. For example, one graduate student said, "no, because I feel a lot of these people wanting to help are just applying a formula they learned from a textbook to you. I can do that to myself." This statement resonates with that of another graduate student, who said "No. I don't need someone to hear me chat about stress, and I don't think they can say or do anything I couldn't say or do myself." Teacher education students similarly discussed their reluctance to use this support due to their preference of managing the stress on their own. For example, one teacher education student claimed "No, I would rather deal with my stress on my own," while another student suggested, "I don't think so because I can deal with it in my own way." While many students commented on how they use personal coping skills and therefore do not require e-counselling, one graduate student also commented that he or she may be willing to try e-counselling if the use of personal coping skills was ineffective: "I've never become totally paralyzed due to stress.

If I were unable to cope with the stress, then yes, I would seek help. But I've never reached that point." Therefore, although some students may not be willing to use e-counselling due to their use of personal coping skills, their willingness to use this support may change depending on the level of stress they experience.

Face-to-face support/support from closer connections. Several graduate student participants implied that the reason they would not use the online service was because they preferred talking to other people. As one participant suggested, "Probably not. I prefer talking to those I love and trust for advice and understanding." Similarly, another participant claimed, "at this point in my life I would decline, as I feel I have enough support around me, and loved ones who are listening and helping me stay sane." Consequently, in these cases the participants may not require this type of support because of the support they are receiving from other sources.

Similarly, several graduate students claimed they would rather use face-to-face professional support. One of these students argued he or she would not use online support and claimed, "I think in-person counselling would be better because that way I could interact with a real person. I think in-person would feel more supportive because it is real." Similarly, a teacher education student said, "I like the idea, but it causes me stress to think that by email, my immediate stress would probably not be resolved because I'd have to wait for a response. [The institution's] personal counselling is an amazing service that I will probably continue using (as opposed to the e-mail idea)."

While several students commented on their preference for face-to-face, they also noted their willingness to use online: "Possibly. My preference is face to face but would be willing to try an e-version." Similar to the statement made by the graduate student,

two teacher education students also voiced their preference to seek in-person support prior to online. One teacher education student claimed, "if I thought I needed it at the time, and could not find something in person (which would be my preferred method), then yes." The other said, "maybe, if I thought it would be beneficial to me, but I think talking to a person face-to-face would help me more." As such, online support through e-counselling may be a source of support that students are willing to use if they are unable to access or use face-to-face support, for whatever reason.

Time constraints. Several teacher education students said that they likely would not use online support for reasons related to the time they have available. For example, one student said he/she would not "because it would take up what little time I already have for myself." One graduate student also suggested, "I would like to explore that option but I feel the whole process of registering or participating in free e-counselling would be too time consuming." Another graduate student had similar concerns with regards to the format and how time-consuming it might be: "Potentially. Depends if the support was from a reliable source. Depends if the site was easy to use/not too time consuming. I would be skeptical."

Despite several students noting their lack of time to make use of such a support, some noted that they did think it would be effective. One student, for example, claimed:

> I think being able to get help with academic stress is a good idea and I may even try free e-counselling however there is the possibility if I could I may not due to the fact that when I have high academic it's because I have so much work to do and so little time so I would not feel able to exchange time I could be doing schoolwork for time spent emailing a counsellor.

Another teacher education student presented similar concerns with regards to the lack of time:

> Depends on what the stress was regarding, usually it is a timing thing for me so if I already felt like I had no time and I had too many things due at once I probably would not waste my time searching and finding out about e-counselling unless I had previously used that service during a time of moderate stress when I had more time.

Consequently, while some students suggested they were concerned about the time it may take to become familiar with the format and comfortable using an online form of support, others claimed they would not use this support because of a lack of time in general.

Themes revealed in the data which were considered deterring factors were the use of personal coping skills, use of face-to-face support or support from closer connections, and time constraints. However, as was suggested earlier in this section, e-counselling may address social-emotional concerns and stigma, accessibility issues, and concerns regarding anonymity/confidentiality.

Chapter Summary

Causes of and responses to academic stress were first discussed in this section. Themes related to causes of stress that were highlighted included time management, expectations, course components, transitions, and support. Responses to stress were discussed in terms of (a) emotional responses, (b) physical responses, and (c) behavioural responses. Following discussion of causes and responses to stress, participants' levels of stress were described, and subsequent sections then addressed the emotional and behavioural components of help-seeking. Participants' likeliness to seek various supports

was described, and factors affecting their willingness to seek support from these sources were discussed. Lastly, participants' use of the Internet for stress-related information and support was synthesized, and factors affecting their willingness to use e-counselling were highlighted.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

This study focused on faculty of education students' conceptions of and experiences with academic stress and help-seeking. An online questionnaire that comprised qualitative, open-ended questions was developed based on the literature and a pilot test. A grounded theory methodology was used in order to ensure the study was grounded in the data as a theory was developed. This research stemmed from both an examination of existing literature surrounding mental stress in postsecondary students and consideration of my own experiences.

Summary of the Study

An examination of current literature surrounding academic stress in postsecondary students indicated that there were significant changes being made in higher education in order to address the difficulties students were experiencing. However, when reading the literature corresponding specifically to faculty of education students, there was a significant gap in understanding how these students experience academic stress and help-seeking. Much of the existing literature examined either the general student population or specific vocations that did not include future educators. In terms of preservice teacher education students, existing research largely focused on students' experiences in their placements, and as a result, they did not consider how their stress might have changed throughout their teacher training program or how this stress compared to other years of their postsecondary education. Research addressing graduate students similarly failed to examine future educators' perspectives of academic stress and help-seeking, and instead focused on graduate students as a general population or specific faculties that were outside of education.

Accordingly, the main purpose of this study was to explore faculty of education students' perceptions of and experiences with academic stress and their associated help-seeking behaviours. In addition to examining the general concept of help-seeking the study aimed to examine whether e-mental health was a component of faculty of education students' help-seeking, and if so, how they used it. The main research questions that guided the study were therefore:

1. How do teacher education and Master of Education students conceptualize academic stress?
2. How do teacher education and Master of Education students conceptualize help-seeking for academic stress?
3. How do teacher education and Master of Education students use the Internet for information about or support for academic stress?

The study was exploratory, in the sense that it was meant to explore a topic that had not been extensively researched. Because academic stress, help-seeking, and e-mental support had not been examined in the specific populations this study sought to examine, a grounded theory design was appropriate as it required the development of a theory that was strongly rooted in the voice of the study's participants. As a result of the grounded theory design and a focus on the perspectives of participants, a qualitative methodology that included open-ended survey questions was used in order to provide participants with the freedom to discuss their own thoughts and experiences with the study's topics.

Analysis of the data found causes of and responses to academic stress, with causes of stress including time management difficulties, expectations, course components, and

transitions. Emotional, physiological, and behavioural responses were discussed. Individual behavioural coping skills were identified as being a key component in determining whether a student would seek informal (friends, family) or formal (academic or professional) support. Others factors including accessibility and awareness of support, effectiveness of and prior experience with support, social-emotional concerns, and time constraints were highlighted by participants as being key factors influencing whether they sought support. Similar factors were discussed in relation to whether participants would seek support through e-counselling.

This chapter will include a discussion of the results of this study, using a descriptive model that addresses the topics in the study findings by showing the relationships and processes that were discussed. The implications of this research in terms of practice and theory are then discussed, and possible areas for further research based on the findings of this study are considered. For implications of the work according to theory, Maslow's (1954) and Alderfer's (1969) theories of human motivation are used as frameworks within which causes and responses to stress can be framed, and discussion of the theoretical implications can be presented.

Discussion of Results

This section presents a discussion of the study's findings, specifically: the causes of and responses to stress; the influence of individual perception on responses to stress; informal and formal help-seeking; and help-seeking from e-mental health. As shown in Figure 3, individual topics from the study were used to develop a descriptive diagram illustrating the relationships and processes addressed in this study, and discussion surrounding this diagram will be included in this section.

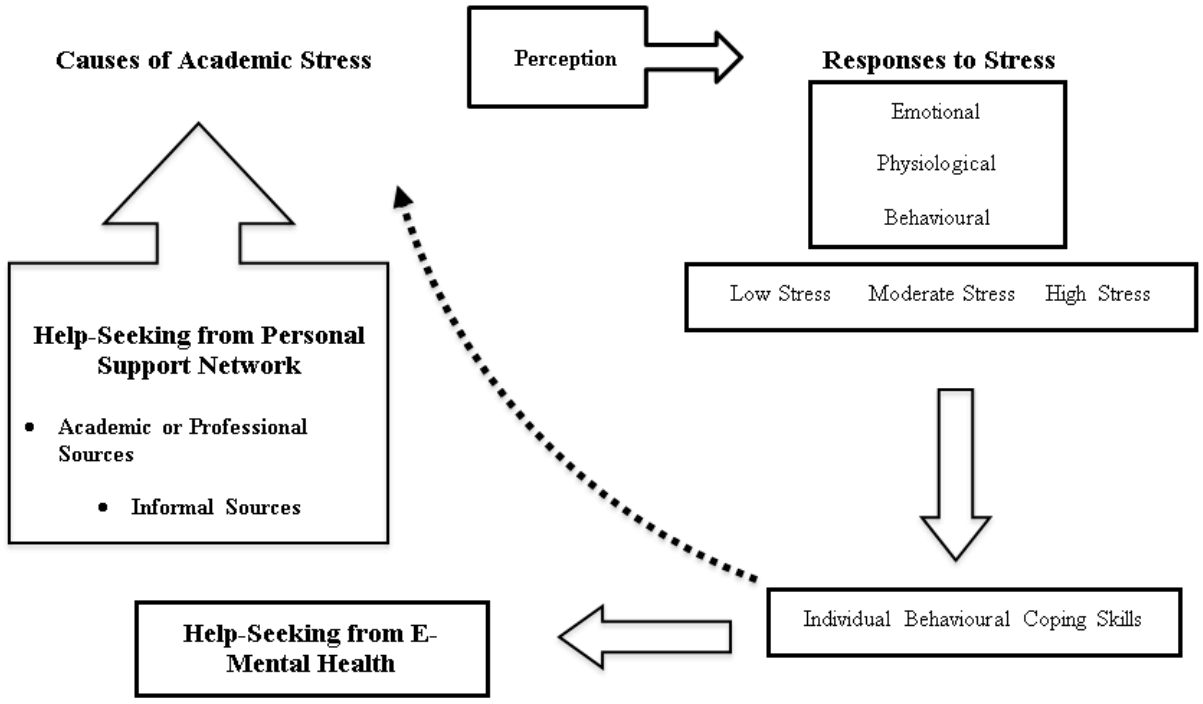

Figure 3. Descriptive diagram of relationships and processes.

Causes of Stress

Discussion in this section addresses the causes of stress that were presented in chapter 4. Specifically, time management, expectations, course components, transitions, and support are discussed. The responsibilities of the student and members of the university community are also considered within the discussion of each stressor.

Time management. In terms of causes of stress, there were several findings that were noteworthy and merit further discussion. With time management, participants discussed both their own responsibility in terms of time management issues, in addition to what they felt was outside of their control. From many participants' perspectives, there was an excessive amount of work to complete. However, taking the institution's perspective into consideration, if the amount of work students are required to complete is considered a standard amount, they arguably should have appropriate time management skills in order to ensure the tasks will be completed on time. From the institution's perspective, therefore, it may be the student's responsibility to have the time management skills to complete whatever amount of work is required. However, from the student perspective, at what point is work considered "excessive"? Is it reasonable to have an assignment due almost every day?

In addition to the amount of stress being discussed, many participants addressed not only the quantity of work but also the quantity of work that is required within a short time frame. Similar to the discussion regarding participants who addressed the quantity of work in general, at what point are work expectations no longer reasonable? Is it the responsibility of the institution and instructors to modify due dates so they are no longer

in the same time frame? Or, is it students' responsibility to adapt and modify their time management skills accordingly?

Additionally, while the stress associated with deadlines could be related to the amount of work that has to be completed for a specific deadline, for these participants, a deadline itself could be a stressor because of the restriction it places on the student. The student is not in control of the deadlines, and therefore, many felt that they were stressful because of the restrictions. Consequently, students most commonly attributed stress related to the quantity of work and the time frame of deadlines as factors outside of their control. Comparatively, few participants suggested their academic stress related to quantity of work and deadlines was the result of their own actions. With this in mind, and taking the previous discussion corresponding to time management into consideration, which aspects of time management are the responsibility of the student, and which are the responsibility of the professors, administrators, or institution? While some of the onus in terms time management is undoubtedly the responsibility of the student, the parameters that the professor, administrator, or institution set should be attainable without it being considered unreasonable or extreme.

However, as discussed in the findings section, financial stress and employment concerns may worsen the issues of time management, especially if the requirements and parameters that are established are already perceived as extremely difficult. The consequence of the decision to obtain employment during the school year is an additional responsibility or area of stress for the student, which may further exacerbate existing time management issues. Students may therefore be faced with decisions that seem to be double-edged swords in the sense that a response to one area of stress—financial stress in

this case—may result in further stress in another area, such as school. Relating this to time management, how are students supposed to balance academic responsibilities with the increasing financial stress that they may be experiencing, which may be the result of attending postsecondary education to begin with? In summation, consideration by students and professors, administrators, and institutions alike should address not only what a reasonable amount of work is to complete within a specific time frame, but also, how students are provided with the time management skills and how they are developed.

Expectations. Personal expectations were a main source of stress for participants. Many participants described the emotional distress that often resulted from setting high expectations for themselves. Therefore, although it is important to set goals in terms of achievement, students must also ensure that their goals and expectations are achievable, and, as a result, students should be taught how to set achievable goals. Additionally, students should be equipped with appropriate coping skills to manage the stress associated with having difficulty meeting their goals, in order to prevent distress. Related to this issue are the findings related to the high expectations of external sources. Some participants described expectations from their program that require a certain level of achievement; this high level of achievement is described as being a constant stressor to many students. Consequently, feelings associated with fear of failure may be developed early in students' postsecondary education. Consideration should be given to the pressure that is placed on students in terms of achieving certain grades, and how students are prepared to face circumstances in which they may not achieve these standards, as this is a significant source of academic stress for faculty of education students.

Making comparisons to others was discussed in terms of stress, as doing so may lead to feelings of insecurity about their own work. An issue that may influence these participants and their feelings of insecurity after making comparisons is the level of uncertainty they experience as a result of external factors. Unclear expectations, in the eyes of a student, may compound stress because students are uncertain about how to achieve the high standard they are expecting, and as a result, unclear expectations may be seen as a threat to their success. If a student is uncertain about assignment expectations, has high personal expectations, or high expectations from external sources, then making comparisons to other students can compound the issue and create academic stress.

Course components. Course components correspond to the previous discussion regarding personal expectations, expectations from external sources, and success, and include assignments that are weighted as a large component of a student's grade. Taking students' fear of failure into consideration, having an assignment that is a significant component of their final grade is a cause of stress due to the fear that getting a low grade on the assignment can result in a low grade in the course. In order to alleviate some of this stress, professors may consider reducing the weighting of assignments, or scaffolding students towards completion of the assignments so that the stress of the students is alleviated.

In chapter 4, I discussed content difficulty as a source of academic stress. The result of having difficult content and having an assignment related to this content is that students may have difficulty starting the assignment. Due to a lack of understanding in terms of the assignment, some students may consequently struggle to start the task and time management issues may ensue. Therefore, scaffolding not only benefits students in

terms of ensuring they are guided towards successful completion of the assignment, but also provides guidance at different stages of the assignments, including the start. As a result, even if the content or assignment is perceived as being difficult, they can receive feedback that helps them improve from their initial attempt at the assignment.

Another aspect of coursework worth discussing involves online components. Although not frequently discussed by participants, it is a noteworthy finding due to the increasing use of online platforms in facilitating aspects of courses. However, it is important that appropriate support is provided to ensure that students are equipped to use these online platforms, and to not assume that they are comfortable with them.

By taking each of the specific course components that were discussed into consideration, a suggestion can be made that different components of coursework can be stressful for different students and that each student is unique in terms of what he or she considers stressful. Therefore, while students have some responsibility in terms of seeking support, professors and teaching assistants should also ensure that they provide effective support for their students. This topic of support also relates to the previous discussion that addressed expectations and the desire to be successful. Without extensive support, some students may feel as though their ability to reach a high standard of achievement is in jeopardy.

Responses to Stress

In some cases the findings suggested the symptoms associated with academic stress were not observable. In particular, the themes discussed under emotional responses, including inadequacy/hopelessness, being overwhelmed/under pressure, and the emotional component of anxiety, can be concealed within the student. Consequently, the

student may be experiencing stress and those around the student may not be aware of it. However, in other cases, the findings suggested there are symptoms that are observable. Particularly with physical responses, such as students' eating and sleeping pattern, lack of concentration, depression, and some of the physical symptoms of anxiety, people around the student may be able to recognize the level of stress that the student is experiencing. The manner in which behavioural responses were described also suggests that academic stress and distress in particular, may be observable, as students may respond in ways that are "not typical," as one student suggested. With this in mind, those surrounding students (e.g., classmates, family, and professors) should be knowledgeable in recognizing signs of distress.

Professors in particular should be conscious of the whole student, including the emotional component, and not just the academic aspect of the student, in order to attempt to recognize distress prior to it becoming paralyzing. Additionally, although few students discussed the effect that stress can have on the surrounding environment, it is worth mentioning due to the fact that this can also be observable in the classroom. The negative effect that stress may have on the environment and the students within a classroom demonstrates the importance of paying attention to responses that students are experiencing as a result of stress.

Perception of Stressors

As shown in Figure 3, perception plays a significant role in what a person considers a stressor and how a person responds to the stressor. The notion of individual perception being a mediating factor was inherent in the data. In this case, what an individual perceives as a stressor may differ from what another person perceives to be a

stressor. With this in mind, it's important for professors, teaching assistants, and administrators be mindful of how each of their decisions and actions may result in academic stress for students, and to consider how students should be supported in the stress that they may experience as a result of these decisions, and whether the benefits of the decision outweigh the possible academic stress that may result.

In addition to perception being an important component that determines what is perceived as stressful, it is also an important component of how individuals respond to stress. Responses to stress were examined according to emotional, physical, and behavioural dimensions, and showed that while some individuals may have responses that address the emotional component of their health, others may largely respond in terms of their physical health. However, in many cases, participants suggested that these ways of responding to stress were connected. If responding to stress in terms of physiology, a person's behaviour might consequently be affected. Similarly, if an individual responds to stress in terms of the emotional component, aspects of the physiological or behavioural component might also be affected.

Level of stress. Perception also plays a significant role in determining the level of stress a student will experience. As demonstrated in Figure 3, level of stress is linked to responses to stress because a person can experience a high level of stress that is embodied through a variety of emotional, physical, and behavioural responses, or they may experience a low level of stress that solely leads to minimal responses. With a significant number of students suggesting they experienced a high level of stress, the responses they experience may encompass all three dimensions of responses. However, participants also suggested that their stress fluctuates and that part of stress is acknowledging that one will

become stressed. For that reason, ensuring students have appropriate coping skills and knowledge of available resources becomes even more important.

Coping skills and level of stress. Coping skills were identified by participants as having an intervening factor in terms of how an individual might respond to stress, particularly with the level of stress that is experienced. Specifically, effective coping skills may limit the level of stress to a moderate level, rather than allowing it to escalate to a high level. If individuals do not have appropriate coping skills, their response to stress, whether emotionally, physically, or behaviourally, might result in a high level of stress being experienced. In describing their levels of stress, some participants suggested their anticipation of stress allowed them to manage their stress. Therefore, as Figure 3 demonstrates, if coping skills are effective and help manage the responses to stress, the student may not need to seek other support. Instead, there is a cyclical process in that the student copes with the stressor, and then may experience the same stressor, or different stressor, at another time.

Informal and Formal Help-Seeking

If participants' stress reached a high level, and their coping skills were not effective in managing the stress, seeking informal or formal stress was often described as the next step in dealing with the stress. This process—illustrated in Figure 3 as help-seeking through e-mental health, informal support, or academic/professional support—is subsequently often the next step in the process of being exposed to a stressor. Sometimes, participants suggested they would use the Internet to find information about or support for stress because by using the Internet, they felt they did not have to admit to others that they were unable to cope with the stress they were experiencing. Informal

sources of support such as friends and family would then be consulted, normally prior to academic or professional supports. In terms of academic support, professors were the most frequently reported source of support. Also worth noting was the brief mention of teaching assistants as a source of support.

Seeking support from professional sources was described as being a desperate last resort, when participants had exhausted all other options and still could not manage their stress. Additionally, concerns affecting participants' willingness to use professional support included the accessibility and awareness of support, social-emotional concerns and stigma, and time constraints.

In addition to accessibility and awareness of support, social-emotional concerns and stigma, and time constraints, the effectiveness of and prior experience with support also had an effect on whether participants sought support. If seeking support from informal sources was effective in the past, then this type of support might be used again, rather than using a different type of support. This is illustrated in Figure 3 in the way that the cyclical approach to the processes mean that past experiences with stress, responses to stress, and help-seeking will affect each of these things when they are experienced again. This is similarly the case with formal support whereby the person's willingness to use this support in the future might be negatively affected if previous formal support resulted in negative experiences.

Participants described situations relating to both situations. In terms of informal support, many described the support from friends and family as effective while others suggested these supports were not sufficient as they were unable to relate to the academic issues. With formal support, some participants described the success

associated with previous experiences and suggested they would use this support again. On the other hand, some participants claimed they had negative experiences and would therefore resist seeking this support again. Therefore, the importance of ensuring that support is effective, when it is sought, is significant due to the critical condition of prior experiences on future decisions.

Help-Seeking From E-mental Health

Help-seeking through e-mental health in terms of using the Internet to find information about or support for stress is frequently described as consisting of Google searches. Although almost half of the participants suggested they use the Internet for these reasons, few described specific websites they used to seek information about or support for stress. Several participants described starting with a Google search and then navigating through various areas of the Internet to find what they needed. While remedies for stress in terms of how to deal with stress were often sought, one participant's suggestion that this "gets a little intimidating with all the blogs, chat groups, and online support systems" is consistent with other research that has addressed this topic (e.g., Neal et al., 2011).

Although support for e-counselling was only provided by approximately 25% of participants, the reasons provided by participants in support of the use e-counselling are noteworthy. As e-counselling addresses social-emotional concerns and stigma, accessibility issues, and anonymity/confidentiality issues, it appears to be a viable option for support.

However, in several cases, modifications of face-to-face support, particularly in terms of accessibility, may change the perception of the participants. For example, with

the participant who claimed e-counselling would work due to its accessibility according to her schedule, changes in the accessibility of support on campus in terms of the operation hours and availability of appointments may persuade the participant to use the face-to-face support. Further examination of whether factors affecting willingness to use e-counselling are factors associated with individuals seeking support or the institution where they attend is therefore warranted.

Similarly, with increasing awareness of the stigma associated with help-seeking and actions being taken to tackle this issue, it may not be an issue that continues to deter people from using face-to-face support, and consequently, may offset the benefit of e-counselling in addressing this issue. However, if the participants who claimed they would be willing to use e-counselling consist of those that would not seek face-to-face support due to reasons such as stigma or negative prior experiences, then e-counselling is an alternative.

Some participants, however, suggested they would be unlikely to use e-counselling due to the use of personal coping skills and time constraints. Interestingly, though, these were also factors that were reported when participants discussed why they would not use face-to-face support. Therefore, these may be participants who are unlikely to seek any type of support, whether face-to-face or online. Similarly, the participants who claimed they would not use e-counselling because of the use of support from closer connections such as friends and family may also be participants who would not seek professional support due to these close connections. With this in mind, if the participants who claimed they would use e-counselling are participants who

would not use face-to-face support, but require professional support, then e-counselling may be a viable option for support.

Implications

In this section I consider possible applications of the study's findings for practice, theory, and future research. I address initiatives that postsecondary institutions are implementing and others that could be implemented to address the stress inherent in the faculty of education student population. Furthermore, the implications of the adapted Maslow (1954) and Alderfer (1969) models are discussed. Additionally, areas for further research are proposed by paying particular attention to specific members of the higher education community as well as e-mental health.

Implications for Practice

This study demonstrated that academic stress is relevant to students in these particular teacher training and Master of Education programs. Having insight into how students respond to stress is particularly relevant for practice in terms of recognizing students who may be experiencing distress. Several of the needs identified by students particularly in the existence needs category, may be observable. With this in mind, being more aware and conscientious in terms of student well-being may be one step postsecondary institutions can take. The main theme discussed by participants in terms of their likeliness to seek academic or professional support was their level of stress. Often, academic or professional support was only sought as a desperate last resort. Part of what many universities in Canada are addressing is how to tackle this. How do postsecondary institutions get students to seek support prior to it becoming distress or a last resort?

The University of British Columbia recently launched the Early Alert Program ("Early Alert," n.d.; Navas, 2012) with the purpose of addressing their role in student distress. The program aims to extend support to students who may be in early stages of distress. The onus is on faculty and other members of the university's community to take action when they recognize a student may be in distress. If two or more members of the university community report signs of distress for a particular student, then the Early Alert Program steps in and contacts the student. A key component of the program, however, is training faculty members, residence leaders, and university staff to recognize and be aware of distress and how students may illustrate certain symptoms.

Many postsecondary institutions, including the University of British Columbia, are taking significant steps towards equipping faculty with skills to respond appropriately to students who seek support from them. Faculty may be one of the first steps students take beyond seeking informal support. As such, faculty may serve as gatekeepers for students in distress and as a result, ensuring faculty members are prepared to direct students in the right direction is becoming even more important. At Queen's University, faculty and staff have been equipped with strategies and tools provided by the "Green Folder" initiative, which launched in September, 2012 ("Green Folder," 2012). The folder was distributed to all faculty and staff, and includes information about identifying and responding to students in distress. In addition to listing a variety of situations that may require attention, it also provides guidance in terms of how to respond to a student who may express some concerns, or how to approach a student who may appear to be in distress. Additionally, key contact information is provided for different resources on campus and advice for how to

respond to students who are hesitant to seeking support is given. The initiative grew from a similar program developed at McMaster University where faculty were similarly provided with information about how to respond to students in distress and contact information through an "Orange Reference Folder" (McMaster University, 2013). Postsecondary institutions are taking steps towards providing faculty with appropriate skills and important information so that they are equipped to help students who may need their support. A similar initiative could therefore be implemented within a faculty of education specifically, so that resources and information specific to students in this faculty is relevant to their needs.

In addition to faculty being in an important position to help those who are stressed or in distress, peers were also highlighted by this study as being one of the main sources of informal support for students who were experiencing stress. It therefore becomes increasingly important for postsecondary students to be knowledgeable in how to respond to a peer who may be in distress. Having students who are able to recognize signs of distress, know what to do, and whom to contact are key issues in ensuring students are equipped with the skills to help a friend or classmate who is distressed. At Queen's University, a component of the "Green Folder" initiative involves the distribution of "Green Cards" to students that have key contact information listed for different supports on campus ("Green Card," 2013). Information cards similar to those at these institutions could therefore be adapted and provided to students who are new to the teacher training program or Master of Education program.

Implications for Theory

Creswell (2012) suggests grounded theorists present their theory as either a visual

coding paradigm, a series of propositions, or a story written in narrative form. In this case, a visual model was created and presents a framework of the topics addressed in this study. Data from the study align with Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs, which begins with physiological needs and is then organized by a hierarchic prepotency to also include safety needs, love and belongingness needs, esteem needs, and the need for self-actualization. Alderfer's (1969) theory of human needs, which extends Maslow's theory of human motivation, comparatively categorizes needs according existence, relatedness, and growth needs. The headings from each model were combined to form a hierarchy in which data from the study could be placed. Sections of chapter 4 were synthesized and the main topics were listed alongside corresponding examples of participant responses (see Appendix B). Causes of academic stress (time management, expectations, course components) that participants identified were each placed in their own chart. Often, participants indicated emotional, behavioural, or physiological responses specific to these causes of stress, and as a result, these specific responses were recorded alongside their respective causes. Separate charts for emotional responses, physical responses, and behavioural responses discussed in chapter 4 were also then placed in chart format according to Maslow and Alderfer's headings. The charts were then synthesized and Figure 4 was created using the main keywords from the charts and the level of needs they were aligned with according to Maslow and Alderfer's frameworks. Figure 4 therefore illustrates this study's findings in terms of causes and responses to academic stress according to Maslow (1954) and Alderfer's (1969) frameworks.

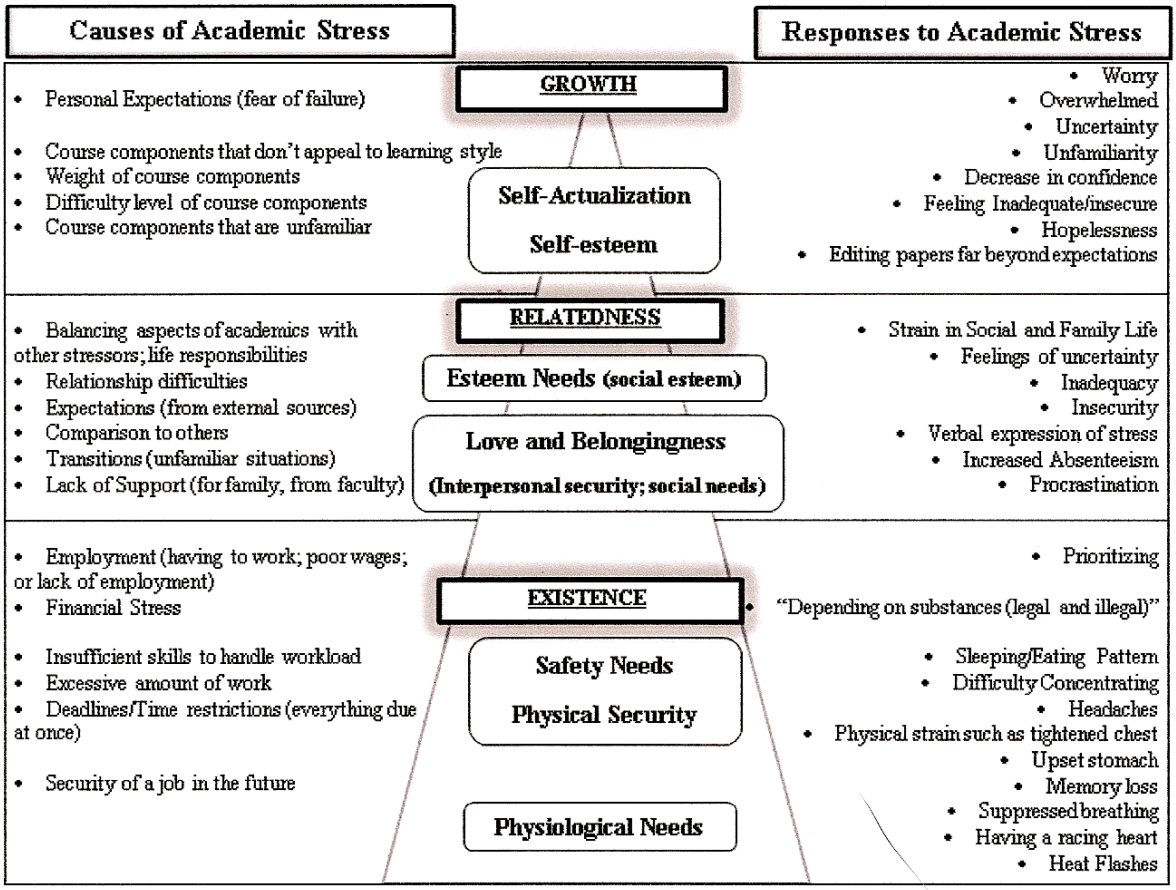

Figure 4. Causes of and responses to academic stress according to Maslow's (1954) and Alderfer's (1969) frameworks.

Existence needs. The causes of academic stress that participants discussed and which relate to Alderfer's (1969) existence needs include stress related to employment, including having to work while also being a student or not being able to secure employment, and financial stress. Financial stress, from the participants' perspective, is the result of escalating tuition fees as well as increased cost of living. An examination of these existence needs suggests that it may be difficult to narrow down stress as solely stemming from academics, and that in fact, there may be some overlap between different areas of stressors for students. With this in mind, however, it perhaps suggests that in order to be motivated by higher level needs, such as relatedness and growth needs, students must fulfill existence needs that address basic academic needs, in addition to basic needs that would motivate any individual.

Although employment and financial stress strongly align to existence needs, when incorporating data into the chart there were other needs described by participants that would be basic requirements of students in the postsecondary context. In this case, the model may underline a hierarchy of needs that is specific to postsecondary students. For example, students must have sufficient skills to handle the workload, they will encounter work, and they will face deadlines and time restrictions. However, in this case, the participants claimed they had insufficient skills to handle the workload, had an excessive amount of work, and had difficulty with timelines and deadlines, particularly when they occur at the same time. Therefore, this model may provide insight into different levels of needs specific to students, and which may fuel further research into the basic needs of needs of students that must be met before students are able to progress to other levels.

Consideration of whether institutions are addressing the growth needs of students may first begin with whether the most basic existence needs of being a student are met.

In addition to these needs being concerns of participants, an interesting finding related to the existence needs category includes the security of jobs in the future. This means that academic stress not only affects students' existence needs currently but may also impinge upon their future needs as well.

While the causes of academic stress that aligned with existence needs were largely related to safety needs, responses to academic stress conversely strongly related to the physiological needs that are a component of Alderfer's (1969) existence category. These responses to academic stress, or threats to existence needs, are the main findings that were described as being physiological responses to stress. The main issues in this case were related to responses such as sleeping and eating patterns, difficulty concentrating, headache, and physical strain.

Relatedness needs. The causes of academic stress that participants discussed and which relate to Alderfer's relatedness needs first include balancing aspects of academic with other responsibilities outside of school in addition to relationship difficulties. Participants indicated that it was often difficult to fulfill responsibilities outside of school because of their academic requirements. A consequence of the difficulty balancing different responsibilities was relationship difficulties. Therefore, the combination of having difficulty balancing different responsibilities in addition to experiencing relationship difficulties threatens the fulfillment of relatedness needs. The social needs of the participants may not be met because they are focused on fulfilling their academic responsibilities.

High expectations and unclear expectations from external sources were also placed within the relatedness category. Esteem needs, according to Maslow, can be classified according to two positions. The second position, which is relevant to Alderfer's (1969) relatedness needs, suggests there is a "desire for reputation or prestige (defining it as respect or esteem from other people), status, dominance, recognition, attention, importance, or appreciation" (p. 90). With this in mind, high expectations or unclear expectations as causes of academic stress arguably conflict with students' esteem needs in the sense that they may be making it difficult to fulfill desires related to status, dominance, and recognition.

Making comparisons to others in terms of academics is another stressor students identified that is relevant to this second position of esteem needs. As a result of a person's desire for reputation or prestige, which is rooted in social esteem, one may make comparisons to others. From the perspective of students, participants suggested they make comparisons to others in terms of their progress in the program or their academic work. Making these comparisons to others may fuel a sense of competitiveness students strive to fulfill their esteem needs and achieve status or dominance. Students also want to feel as though they belong in the program and by comparing themselves to others they may be attempting to ensure they are fitting in. As such, in this case making comparisons to others would not be considered a threat to fulfilling relatedness needs, but instead, may be considered a tactic students could be using as they try to fulfill these needs.

Transitions, although not a cause of stress that was frequently discussed by participants, also align with relatedness needs. In this case, participants discussed how transitions were difficult due to being faced with unfamiliar situations in which

comparisons to others may exacerbate stress. As a result of the uncertainty experienced during transitions, such as at the beginning of a program, students' sense of belongingness may be threatened. Additionally, students' interpersonal security and social esteem may be challenged due to being in unfamiliar situations.

Balancing academics with other life responsibilities, relationship difficulties, expectations from external sources, comparison to others, and transitions, are all needs that may be intensified when students have a lack of support from family, spouses, or faculty.

Each of these stressors may result in emotional or behavioural responses. In this case, difficulty balancing different responsibilities can result in a response of strain in social and family life. However, worth noting is the fact that strain in social and family life can be both a response to stress and a cause of academic stress. Relationship difficulties and difficulty balancing responsibilities were described as stressors but strains in social and family life were similarly described as being responses to stress.

Have high or unclear expectations, making comparisons to others, and being in unfamiliar situations such as in transitions were described as causing emotional responses such as feelings of uncertainty, inadequacy, and insecurity.

While emotional responses were described as responses to stress that aligned to relatedness needs, behavioural responses also relate to this level of needs. In this case, verbal expression of stress, increased absenteeism, and procrastination were aligned with relatedness needs due to their role as strategies students may be using to manage the stress involved in trying fulfill needs in this category. In terms of absenteeism, participants suggested they may not go to class because they were unprepared. Although

not stated, students may not attend classes when unprepared or stressed because they arguably don't want to appear as though they don't belong. If students are concerned about their social esteem needs, including their reputation and prestige, they likely won't want to go to class unprepared because they may appear inadequate or unsatisfactory to others.

Growth needs. If a person is motivated by aspects of ensuring personal growth then he or she is motivated by components of the growth category of Alderfer's (1969) E. R. G. theory. Previously, the second stance on esteem needs proposed by Maslow was discussed, and here, the first stance is applicable. Maslow (1954) suggests the first position involves "desire for strength, for achievement, for adequacy, for mastery, and competence, for confidence in the face of the world, and for independence and freedom" (p. 90). The growth category of Alderfer's model includes not only this first position of esteem needs but also the self-actualization component that is at the top of Maslow's hierarchy.

Personal expectations were described by participants as having a large influence on stress levels. Participants described having high expectations for themselves and their stress being intensified by a fear of failure. Considering growth needs address needs of individual growth and development, personal expectations were consequently aligned with growth needs. Similarly, course components, difficult level of course components, and course components that are unfamiliar were stressors that participants discussed that were also placed in the growth category. When considering the responses students had to these stressors, they should be aligned with the growth category due to the fact that they may threaten students' ability to fulfill growth needs.

Alongside each cause of stress participants described how they were likely to

respond. For the most part, participants highlighted emotional responses, with one behavioural response to these academic stressors being editing papers far beyond expectations. Similar to the responses that aligned with the relatedness category, no physiological responses aligned with the growth category. Several of the emotional responses participants highlighted in relation to the stressors in the growth level of needs were also reported in the relatedness needs, such as feelings of uncertainty, insecurity, and inadequacy. Other responses that were related to the growth category, however, included worry, being overwhelmed, decrease in confidence, and hopelessness.

While findings from this study should not be generalized due to its exploratory nature, this research may still provide the foundation for implications in terms of theoretical application. This study's findings and their alignment to Maslow's (1954) and Alderfer's (1969) frameworks suggest that further examination of how faculty of education students are motivated is warranted. Exploring how a hierarchy of needs specific to faculty of education students is influenced, whether positively or negatively, by a teacher education could provide insight into how postsecondary institutions can modify these programs. For example, in terms of responses to stress, several relatedness needs such as feelings of uncertainty, unfamiliarity, inadequacy, insecurity, and hopelessness threaten students' ability to fulfill relatedness and growth needs. Teacher education programs and Master of Education programs may want to investigate how they address these issues within their program and with the students. What steps might postsecondary institutions take in preparing faculty of education students for their profession while paying particular attention to growth and relatedness needs?

Additionally, a significant number of responses to academic stress aligned with

Alderfer's (1969) existence category. With the proposition that existence needs must be fulfilled prior to an individual advancing towards other needs, how can students effectively engage in their education when the fulfillment of their existence needs is being threatened by academic stress? Furthermore, as Alderfer suggests, if individuals have difficulty fulfilling relatedness or growth needs they may regress and their motivation may shift towards existence needs. With this in mind, how effective are education programs if the level of stress their students experience frustrates their fulfillment of higher level needs? If faculty of education students focus on their physiological and safety needs rather than on growth needs, self-esteem, and self-actualization, is their preparation for the workplace sufficient? And, are they getting as much as they could be from their academic studies? Future investigations that specifically examine how academic stress affects students' motivation, using Maslow (1954) and Alderfer (1969) as the theoretical foundation could therefore have significant implications in terms of teacher education programs.

Implications for Further Research

Although additional research is needed in order to further develop the proposed theory and substantiate some of the findings of this research, some specific suggestions in terms of additional projects can be made. While this study sought to examine the academic stressors faculty of education students' experience, additional research into the role of the institution in terms of these stressors is required. Is it the responsibility of postsecondary institutions to respond to the reported stressors students report and make changes to policies as a result? Additionally, is it possible to separate academic stress from other life stressors that students experience? If not, how do postsecondary

institutions help students navigate the two? Or, at what point should the responsibility be placed on students? When does it become the responsibility of students to adapt and improve their coping skills in order to manage stress associated with their postsecondary experience?

Further insight into the faculty perspective would shed light on how they are managing issues related to student distress. Qualitative first-hand accounts of the issues faculty are confronted with and how they address them may be informative to faculty at other institutions who may not be guided by programs such as the Green Folder initiative. Similarly, insight into the perspectives of teaching assistants may also be valuable and serve to inform changes at the institutional level. Large numbers of students enrolled in classes often mean that faculty is not students' first contact with courses. Teaching assistants are therefore often the first source of contact with students in terms of their coursework and should therefore also be equipped with skills to support students who are experiencing difficulties. Further research into the experiences teaching assistants may be exposed to could provide information with regards to the skills that are needed to help students. What policies are in place to support teaching assistants in terms of their students' well-being?

Peers and classmates were two of the most frequently reported sources of informal support in this study. Additional research into the role peers and classmates have in terms of providing support or information about sources of support for other students is therefore needed. An examination of what makes peer support effective would allow institutions to adapt policy accordingly in order to ensure students are knowledgeable in how to support their peers.

In addition to peers and classmates being a significant source of informal support, members of participants' families were also frequently reported as a source of informal support. An examination of how universities and colleges keep parents informed with regards to student well-being is important to consider. What policies are in place to inform parents about the resources available on the campus their child attends? What resources are available if parents are concerned about the mental health of their child who is a student?

In terms of faculty of education students specifically, an examination of teacher education programs and how they address the emotional component of prospective teachers would be valuable. How do teacher training pand Master of Education programs teach the "whole" student and prepare students to become teachers who may experience occupational stress?

While this study sought to examine whether students in the participant groups use the Internet to find information about or support for stress, this is an area of research that would benefit from further examination. If students are using the Internet to find information about stress or support for stress, rather than doing Google searches they may be supported more effectively if the information they are looking is more easily accessible by using a specific mental health component of their respective institution's website. If students are able to receive information they need from the school's website, then the need to navigate Google to find what they need may be reduced.

The e-counselling component of this study is also an area that requires further research. In addition to factors affecting willingness to seek face-to-face support being explored, participants also provided justification for why they would or would not use an

e-counselling service. While it appeared as though several of the reasons why participants would use e-counselling were factors that deterred students from using face-to-face support further examination of how these factors compare is needed. How do the factors that affect willingness to use e-counselling compare to factors affecting willingness to seek face-to-face support? With this in mind, additional research would be beneficial in terms of collecting additional data with the purpose of further developing the proposed grounded theory and exploring how postsecondary institutions can address the difficulties faculty of education students may be facing.

Final Thoughts

In chapter 1, I briefly described my perspective in relation to academic stress and help-seeking. With these topics only being quietly discussed amongst peers, it was often difficult to determine whether what I was experiencing was similar to what my peers were experiencing. When I started this research I grounded it in literature and the state of current research. However, the underlying rationale of wanting to see whether academic stress and mental health difficulties were experienced by other prospective educators, because of my own experiences, continued to be reaffirmed. I recall reading through the questionnaire responses and having many "aha" moments, in which the responses I was reading could very well have been my own. It was evident that many participants were experiencing much of the same issues I continue to experience, thereby reassuring me that this exploratory study is only a starting point.

Although the findings of this study are discipline-specific in the sense that they stem from the specific population of prospective educators, issues surrounding student distress and help-seeking are likely not unique to the site of this study. A 2009 study at

McMaster University that encompassed 905 undergraduate students indicated that almost 90% of participants reported feeling overwhelmed, 56% of students claimed they had periods of feeling hopeless, and one-third reported depression (Craggs, 2012). The University of Waterloo, on the other hand, conducted an assessment of how they address student mental health and provided recommendations for improvements. In this case, the top five aspects of university experience in descending degree of difficulty included: managing time effectively; getting enough sleep; managing academics; managing anxiety related to academic success; and managing life stressors (University of Waterloo, 2011). Findings at both institutions are consistent with the findings of this study. Combining my personal experience with the current state of research at postsecondary institutions, such as with McMaster University and the University of Waterloo, in addition to the findings of this study suggests that this area of research will continue to be a critical area for further investigation.

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Appendix A

Online Survey Questions

1. What does academic stress mean to you?
2. How do you know when you or others are experiencing academic stress?
3. To what extent do you think you experience academic stress?
4. How long does it take you to overcome emotions related to academic stress?
5. What do you think causes your or others' academic stress?
6. How does academic stress affect your academic performance: in seminars and lecture, on papers and exams, for studying and organization, and in interactions with peers, professors etc.?
7. How does experiencing academic stress affect your overall university experience? (example: with relationships)
8. Has your academic stress changed from before you began university? If yes, in what way?
9. What does 'seeking help' mean to you?
10. How likely are you or others to seek help when you experience academic stress?
11. Which emotions do you associate with seeking help and why do you think you experience each of these? How do you overcome these emotions?
12. What factors do you think contribute to your or others' willingness to seek help for academic stress?
13. Where do you or others seek help from?
14. How has your willingness to seek help affected you or others, academically, personally?
15. Do you use the internet to find information or support for stress? If yes, what do you use? (e.g., search engines, websites, chat rooms, social media, games)
16. Would you seek support for academic stress if you were given the option to participate in free e-counselling? (e.g., anonymously e-mailing a counsellor and receiving support)? Why or why not?

Appendix B

Charts Used to Create Theoretical Model

Maslow's Hierarchy	Alderfer's ERG theory	Cause of Stress	*Example from data*
Self-actualization Self-esteem	**GROWTH**	Balancing different stressors and being successful in both	"trying to balance my regular life with my schooling and attempting to be successful in both areas"
Esteem Social-esteem Social needs	**RELATEDNESS**	Balancing aspects of academics with other stressors; life responsibilities	"schoolwork interfering with daily life" "little family time" "more difficult to see my child" "too much school-related work to the point where I cannot focus on anything but my schoolwork"
Love and Belonging Interpersonal security		Relationship difficulties	
Safety Needs Physical security	**EXISTENCE**	Insufficient skills to handle workload	"work exceeds what I'm capable of doing in a normal day" "overwhelming and excessive amount of school work, due or expected to be completed in a specific timeframe" "a moderate level [of stress] through the term, with high stress occurring before assignments are due" "increased cost of living" "undisclosed and escalating tuition feeds" "We don't just go to school. The postsecondary students of today must hold jobs to survive during the school year" "lack of financial support- I am a single mother with no income. I will be using a food bank soon"
Physiological Needs		Excessive amount of work	
		Deadlines/Time restrictions	
		Financial Stress	
		Employment	

Personal

"insufficient skills to handle the workload"

"competing obligations, whether real or self-imposed, (work, family, faith) sometimes push off

when work can get done The more the work gets pushed off, the greater the stress one is likely to feel"

<u>Environmental</u>

Professor

"Pressure to complete assignments well and on time. Professors tend to make due dates around the same time, so multiple assignments due at the same time""

Administration

"administration who set difficult timelines"

Program

"when the program I'm in keeps shifting due dates it provides incomplete information or unclear goals"

Time Management			
Maslow's Hierarchy	**Alderfer's ERG theory**	**Response to Stressor**	***Example from Data***
Self-actualization Self-esteem	**GROWTH**	Worry Overwhelmed	"worried about not completing an assignment on time" "Feeling like I'm underwater. When it's not so bad, I'm still working hard to stay above the sometimes choppy waters. But when things pile up, I feel like I'm trying to hold onto that last gulp of air while being held just under the surface. It means that no matter how hard I try, I just can't do everything and then I feel like I'm constantly underachieving" "when you feel like you absolutely cannot handle the amount of work you have to complete in the time given to complete it"
Esteem Social-esteem Social needs	**RELATEDNESS**		
Love and Belonging Interpersonal security			
Safety Needs Physical security	**EXISTENCE**		
Physiological Needs			

Expectations					
Maslow's Hierarchy	**Alderfer's ERG theory**	**Cause of Stress**	***Example from data***	**Response to Stress**	***Example from data***
Self-actualization Self-esteem	**GROWTH**	**Personal Expectations**	"my own need for high achievement" "It's the pressure I feel to do well…I always want to feel like I can hit high standard when it comes to academic achievement" "Personal failure: Settings goals and being unable to attain them is a cause of my academic stress"	Lack of confidence	
Esteem Social-esteem Social needs	**RELATEDNESS**	**Comparison with others**	"I have yet to meet my faculty consultant, yet I have class with students who have found an advisor and are starting to look into literature- this makes me panic that I am already falling behind" "I think that my academic stress is largely enhanced by the stress of others because then I feel insecure about my work/feel like I have not done a good job"	Feelings of uncertainty	
Love and Belonging Interpersonal security		**Expectations**	"I am in concurrent education/teachers college. We have stress not because we have high expectations for ourselves. We HAVE to do well" "in my undergraduate degree, there was a lot of almost 'threats' from the program and professors that I would be kicked out if I didn't have a certain level of achievement. While those threats don't necessarily exist at the graduate level, I do feel a certain push that without a certain level of achievement, I won't be able to find an advisor and complete my research."	Insecurity	

			"not knowing how to please people of power" "entering an academic program that is not clearly outlined and leaves a lot of ambiguity in terms of expectations"		
Safety Needs Physical security **Physiological Needs**	**EXISTENCE**	**Security of a job in the future**	"the pressure to excel greatly in programs so they have the ability to choose what they wish to do in the future"		

Expectations			
Maslow's Hierarchy	**Alderfer's ERG theory**	**Response to Stressor**	***Example from Data***
Self-actualization Self-esteem	**GROWTH**	Lack of confidence Feelings of uncertainty Feelings of being incompetent Insecurity	"Fear of failure in academics, resulting in fear of failing in life" "uncertainty of finding employment after school" "I worry that I may be a failure academically. If I fail at school, I may not be able to secure a job later in life"
Esteem Social-esteem Social needs **Love and Belonging** Interpersonal security	**RELATEDNESS**		
Safety Needs Physical security **Physiological Needs**	**EXISTENCE**		

Course Components				
Maslow's Hierarchy	**Alderfer's ERG theory**	**Cause of Stress**	***Example from data***	**Response to Stress**
Self-actualization Self-esteem	**GROWTH**	**Course components that don't appeal to learning style**	"an assignment that doesn't appeal to my learning style is given out" "The assignments are much bigger and worth a lot more	

		Weight of course components **Difficulty level** **Course components that are unfamiliar**	of my grade, so if I do poorly on one then it's harder to recover from" "tasks are at a difficulty level that leaves us unsure as to how to tackle the task" "the addition of online components to courses where classroom involvement and homework load is already heavy, is a huge source of stress. Learning to use the new programs/forums on top of familiarizing myself with the course content is very stressful for me."	Uncertainty? Lack of confidence? Unfamiliarity
Esteem Social-esteem Social needs	**RELATEDNESS**	**Transitions**	"I find the start of this program to be stressful because every student appears to have a different understanding and speed of involvement in the research process" "a feeling of being 'lost', especially at the beginning of the year, when trying to familiarize yourself with new teachers, new schedule, new places (classrooms or campuses) and new online networks."	
Love and Belonging Interpersonal security				
Safety Needs Physical security	**EXISTENCE**	**Support**	"no support at school, work, or home"	
Physiological Needs			"writing large papers with little direction/support from faculty"	

			"doing poorly on assignments with little feedback to improve is a source of stress"	

Emotional Responses to Stressors: Threats to ERG *"emotional changes" "unwanted emotions" –Teacher Education students*			
Maslow's Hierarchy	**Alderfer's ERG theory**	**Responses**	***Example from Data***
Self-actualization Self-esteem	**GROWTH**	**Decrease in confidence**	"high stress increases second guessing and lowers confidence in academic performance"
			"limited sense of self-worth"
		Inadequacy	"feeling like they are constantly under-achieving"
			"feeling that you will never get it done"
		Hopelessness	"I almost feel depressed and like giving up"
			"I feel extremely frustrated with a helpless feeling"
Esteem Social-esteem Social needs	**RELATEDNESS**	**Inadequacy**	"feeling like I don't belong because I don't know what I'm doing"
Love and Belonging Interpersonal security			"feeling of being lost"
Safety Needs Physical security	**EXISTENCE**	**Anxiety** (worried, nervous, confused, anxious, irritable, frustrated"	"mood crashes"
Physiological			"elevated sense of doom"
			"thoughts circle endlessly"
			"constant thought on success or failure"
			"consistently worried about the future"

Physical Responses to Stressors: Threats to ERG *"a physiological reaction to mounting psychological anxiety"-Graduate Student*			
Maslow's Hierarchy	**Alderfer's ERG theory**	**Physical Responses**	***Examples from Data***
Self-actualization Self-esteem	**GROWTH**		
Esteem Social-esteem Social needs	**RELATEDNESS**		
Love and Belonging Interpersonal security			
Safety Needs Physical security	**EXISTENCE**	**Sleeping Pattern** • Stay up late to do work • Insomnia	"haggard-looking and becoming more unkempt, tired-looking"
Physiological Needs		**Feeling physical tired and fatigued/ People look tired or drained** **Eating Pattern: Improper eating** • Always hungry • Overeating • Drinking too much coffee <u>OR</u> • Limited appetite • Unable to eat **Concentration** **Other physical responses**	"I tend to be unfocused and lack extreme concentration" "Decreases focus in seminars in seminars and lectures" "sometimes I have a breakdown (worry, crying, panic, etc.)" "I get tension in my muscles, around my neck and shoulders" "tight muscles in the abdomen, upper back,

Safety Needs Physical security **Physiological Needs**	**EXISTENCE**	• Headaches • Physical strain such as tightened chest • Upset stomach • Memory loss • Shaking • Suppressed breathing • Having a racing heart • Heat Flashes	shoulders, and neck"

Behavioural Responses to Stressors: Relationship to ERG *"stress may cause the person to behave in ways they otherwise might not"- Graduate Student* *"the person begins acting in ways that are not 'typical'"-Graduate Student*			
Maslow's Hierarchy	**Alderfer's ERG theory**	**Behavioural Responses**	***Examples from Data***
Self-actualization Self-esteem	**GROWTH**	**Positive Stress** Editing papers far beyond expectations	**"attending teaching blocks and wanting to be the best teacher I can be"** "work less efficiently' "sometimes I just stare at the assignment I'm writing without inspiration"
Esteem Social-esteem Social needs	**RELATEDNESS**	**Positive Stress** Procrastination Verbal Expression of Stress Strain in Social and Family Life	**"working with others causes good stress"** "when I am too overwhelmed I shut down. I will spend an entire evening watching movies rather than working which will actually add to my level of stress later" "people may express their feelings of being overwhelmed" "I know when others are experiencing academic stress because they express it (verbally)" "I cannot focus on anything but schoolwork but do not succeed in finishing it anyways" "people may cancel plans with friends/social events because academic stress is weighing them down" "they cannot find time for things that would normally happen in their week"

Esteem Social-esteem Social needs	**RELATEDNESS**	Increased Absenteeism	"rude to people I love" "when it comes to seminars or lecture I will be more likely to skip classes if I am stressed out" "increasing absenteeism and no response to enquiries" "I would simply not go to class because I knew I'd be expected to know something about readings that I just didn't have enough time to review or read"
Love and Belonging Interpersonal security			
Safety Needs Physical security	**EXISTENCE**	Prioritizing Confidence to Participate <u>Other Behavioural Responses</u> "Depending on substances (legal and illegal)	"Papers would be neglected and pushed to the last minute because other assignments took over" "In seminars, academics stress effects your performance since it may be more difficult to participate" "inability to focus well on those around me and what they're saying or doing" "In seminar and lectures it depends on whether the stress is coming from that particular class or not of whether I will open up or shut down. If I am in class A and am worried about class B I will probably shut down completely from class A topics because I'll be too concerned about class B topics."
Physiological Needs			